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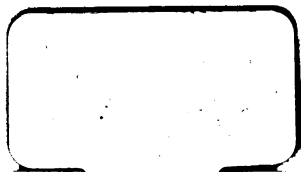
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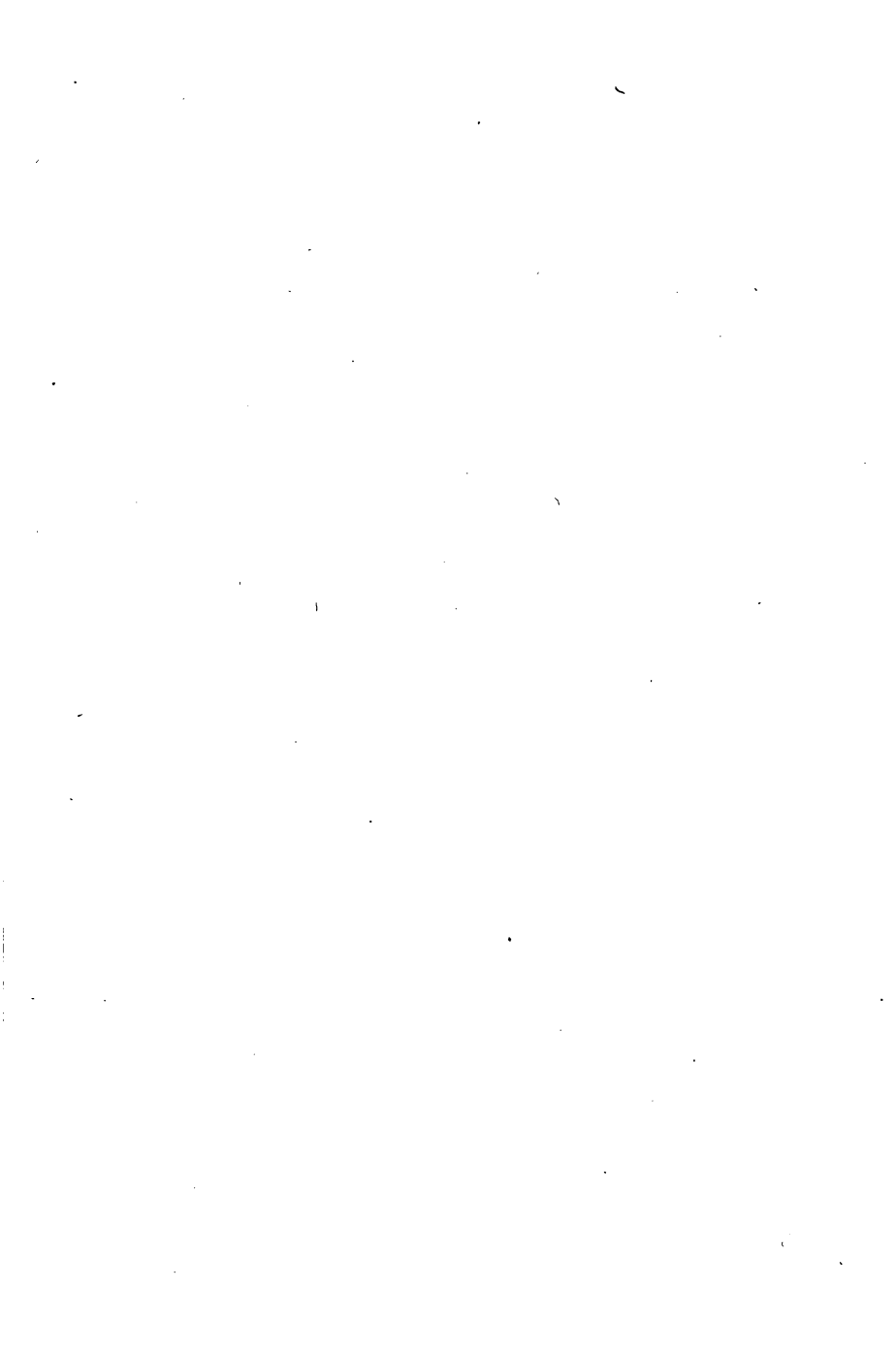
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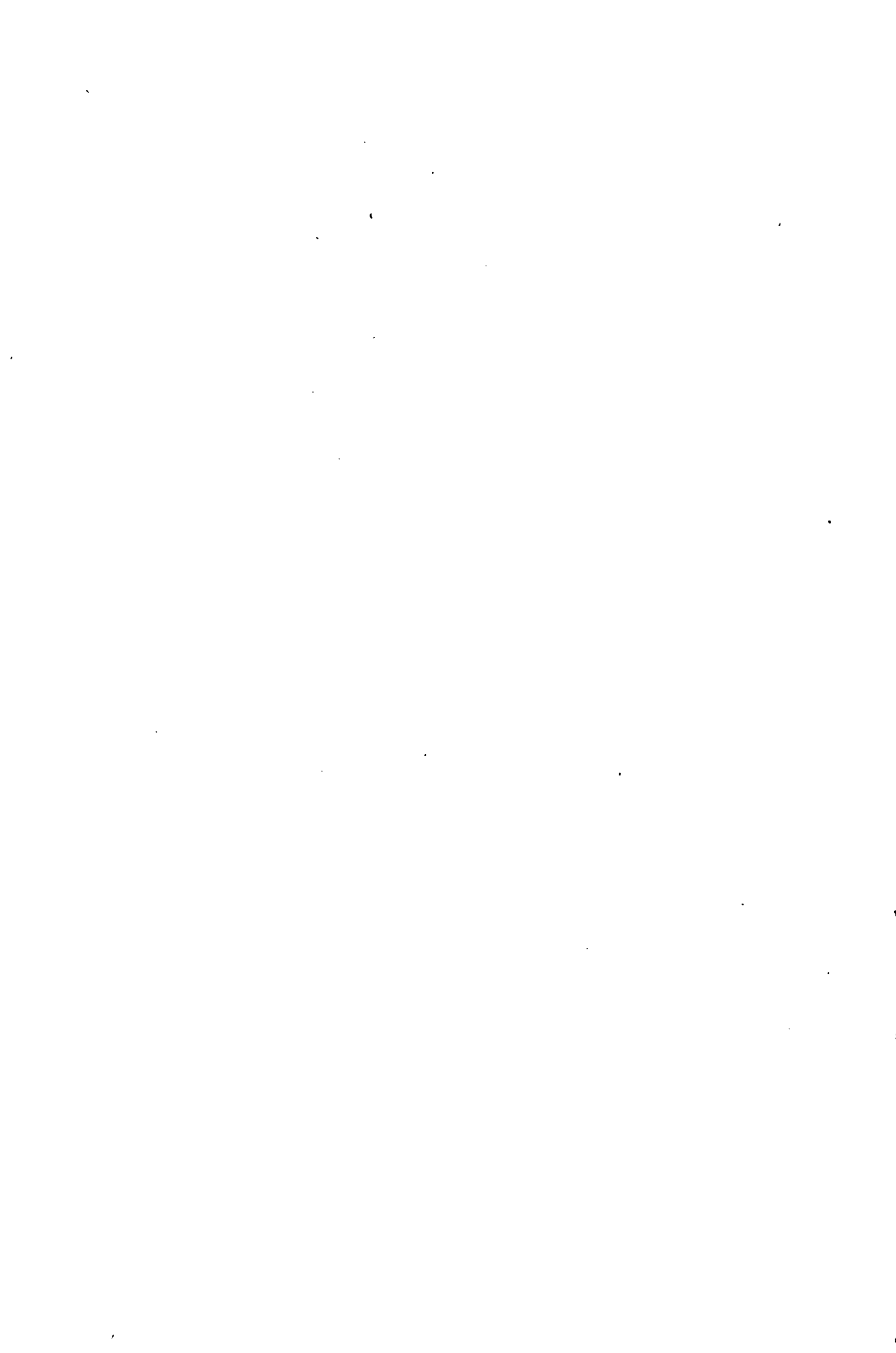
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11





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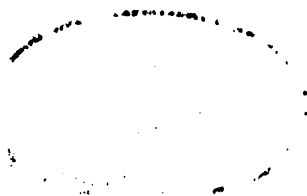
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PASSION AND PATIENCE



What did it matter to her if the house were very small and poor ?
FRONTISPIECE. See page 6



y small and poor ?

ATISPIECE. *See page 69*

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A STORY OF CUBAN PATRIOTS FOR CHILDREN
YOUNG AND OLD

BY

JANIE PRICHARD DUGGAN

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

NANA FRENCH BICKFORD



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Dedicated

TO THE DEAR GIRLS:

**LOLA LAMAR, MARY HINTON, MARY LONG,
DIANA GRACE, FRANCES, AND LITTLE NELLIE**

BY "AUNT JANIE."

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CONTENTS

PART	PAGE
FIRST, PEACE	1
SECOND, WAR	109
THIRD, MACHETE	177
FOURTH, HOPE	229

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

What did it matter to her if the house were very small and poor	<i>Frontispiece</i>
“I will teach you to make cages out of reeds, and we will snare the great fire beetles”	PAGE 22
“He was a Spanish officer”	“ 95
The officer who had given the order for firing was deprived of speech for the instant	“ 236

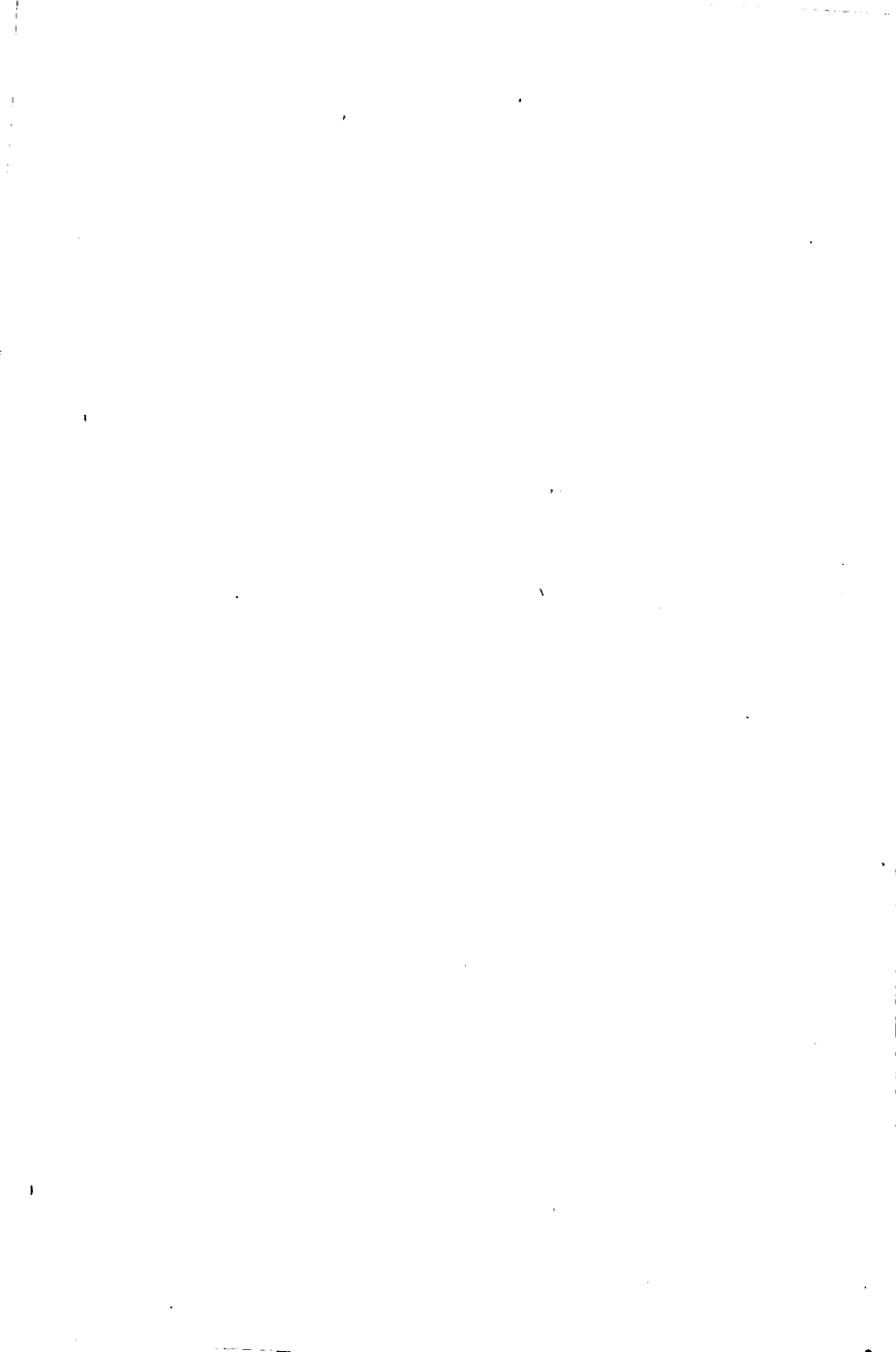


PART FIRST

PEACE

**O leave the noisy town ! O come and see
Our country cots, and live content with me !**

DRYDEN.



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CHAPTER I

A waving glow his bloomy beds display,
Blushing in bright diversities of day.

POPE.

ONCE upon a time — not many years ago — in the lovely island of Cuba, there lived a little girl named Amada. Her father was Pablo Trueno, one of the best gardeners in the great city of Havana, and Amada, or Amadita as he loved to call her, was the very light of his eyes.

Besides Amada, there were three younger children in the gardener's simple home, in that part of Havana called the Old Town.

The house was built of stone, plastered over, and colored with a yellow wash, and was one of a long line of one-storied houses on a narrow, ill-kept street. There was one wide door to the house, opening directly upon the paving stones of the street.

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Inside, the hallway led straight back to a small courtyard behind the house, shut in by the high walls of other houses and courts beyond. In the entrance hall there was a low bench along the side, built of brick and plaster, which might be used in an emergency as an extra bed for a relative visiting from the country. On the other side of the hall, doors opened into two rooms. Back of these, and leading into the court, was a small kitchen.

In the rainy season, it was convenient to have two bedrooms, as it sometimes happened that the roofs of both did not leak at once, and when one room was dry, it was possible to move the sleeping-cots into this room, and leave the dripping raindrops to wear the uneven dirt floor of the other into deeper holes. But you must know that in Havana there is never any rain at all during the dry season, or hardly ever, and during this dry season, the back bedroom in Pablo Trueno's house was occupied by Pablo's three little girls, Amada, aged twelve, Consuelo, eight, and Ana, five years.

Besides the three girls, there was the baby, Herculano, who shared the front room with

PEACE

his parents, a boy with a very large name and a very small body, being just four months old at the time this story begins. There is very little to be said about Herculano, except that he was a yellow-skinned, black-eyed, black-haired, plump baby, who wore very few clothes, and who passed his days nestled in his mamá's or Micaela's arms, or swinging in a shallow box suspended from the ceiling. This box hung low over his mother's cot, so that the baby might have a somewhat softer place than the ground to bump his little bones upon, in case of a fall out of the tipsy cradle.

This then was Pablo's own family, — Helena his wife, and the four children. Yet there was still another inmate of the home, Micaela, the half-witted daughter of a dead brother of Pablo. As the poor creature was also motherless, Pablo had taken her into his family, when Amada was no older than Herculano. The girl was now sixteen years old and would have been pretty, perhaps, had there been more intelligence in the expression of her soft black eyes, or smiles upon her face to relieve the somber droop of her features. The Spaniards sometimes call such pitiful

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creatures as Micaela, "the loved of God," and I think no one can grudge the boon of such love to any needing it so sorely.

However, Micaela with her dark, unsmiling face, and thick, stammering speech, was loved by her little cousins, and generously responded to their affection. Altogether, it was a happy household, when Pablo's rheumatism was bearable, so that his temper became correspondingly so, and when the sun shone warmly into the little court behind the house where the orange tree grew, and the cactus plants with their prickly leaves and queer blossoms.

One morning, in the latter part of June of the year 1894, Amada, with Consuelo and Ana, walked slowly along the narrow street upon which she lived, and which ended in an open, paved square called a "plaza." The street was so narrow that the three little sisters, with hands clasped and arms outstretched, might almost have reached across it from house to house. To-day, however, they were in no mood for such an experiment, as they sauntered along listlessly and somewhat unwillingly. The air was close and sultry, and the paving stones trodden by the three

PEACE

pairs of little sandalled feet were slimy with dirt and dampness. It was not yet noon, and a mist hung over the broad water of the harbor outside the city where the ships lay anchored to the buoys.

Pablo had long since gone to work in his garden. The children were on their way to him now, and very reluctantly had they left home, for only half an hour before a relative had arrived unexpectedly from Limonar, and Amada and her sisters had wished to remain and hear their cousin's news. Instead, they had been hurried off by Helena to tell their father of the arrival, and to ask for money to purchase a fish at market.

"Go tell thy father, my heart's treasure, that we were to have done without fish, to-day," the mother had whispered into Amada's ear, "but now that our cousin Plácido has come, we must feed him with a proper fish." And Amada had obediently set out, though not without a momentary pout, and Consuelo and Ana had been despatched with her, to get them all out of the way so that the mother might have a time of uninterrupted gossip with the son of her aunt.

"Papá's garden is very far away," Consuelo

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complained after awhile, as they entered a plaza on the way across the city. "Why does not our papá work in this plaza, Amadita?"

"Because this is some other man's place, foolish thing!" Amada answered.

Then they sat down on a bench to wait for little Ana, who was lagging behind. The sun shone through the misty air with a power that made grateful the dense shade of the Indian laurel tree above their heads, and not a word of reproof did they utter to the little laggard coming toward them.

The children were not unlike thousands of other little Cuban girls in the great teeming city by the sea. Their skin was sallow, and their bodies small and slight. Amada's long dark hair was caught up out of her neck in a loose knot at the back of her head, but waving locks curled about her forehead and shadowed her dark eyes, which were of velvety softness. Each was dressed in a long scant skirt of coarse blue cotton, tied by a drawstring about the waist, but, while loose sacks covered the arms and necks of the two youngest, Amada's sun-browned chest and elbows were only partly hidden by a worn, chemise-like garment of coarsest white linen.

PEACE

Yet alike as were the sisters in the coloring of complexion and eyes, one would scarcely have needed a second glance at the two sitting together on the bench under the laurel tree, to take in all the warm and eager beauty of Amada's face in contrast with the quiet pathos of Consuelo's, framed by a tangled fluff of light brown hair under her mother's old lace scarf. In the first place, the corners of Amada's red-lipped mouth turned up, not down, and the pearly white teeth inside gleamed when the red lips parted in a charming smile or ready laugh. Then, there was often a spark of mischief in her long-lashed eyes, perhaps suddenly replaced by a solemn gaze from their dark depths, and a tinge of rosy color showed in her cheeks, relieving the sallowness and setting off to better advantage the prettily arched black eyebrows, and the tendrils of black hair waving about forehead and temples.

In a word, while Amada was healthy and active, Consuelo seemed never well, nor perfectly happy, and all this was reflected in her tired little face. Ana, who presently caught up with them, was more like Amada in strength and beauty, and now, leaning her

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

bare elbows on her elder sister's knees, she sniffed with her small tilted nose at a bit of purple heliotrope she had plucked in passing a tempting branch growing in some window-flowerpot. Just now, there was no watchman in sight, and few passers-by disturbed the privacy of their shaded bench.

Then, on and on they traveled again, more rapidly now, sometimes through streets so narrow that opposite neighbors could shake each other's hands while standing in their own balconies, now, across a sunlit plaza surrounded by the palaces of wealthy Spaniards, and once, pausing in the shadow of a gray old church, to cool their lips at a dripping fountain.

Not long before they reached the garden where Pablo worked among the flowers, the girls stopped before the grand entrance of a mansion which had always fascinated them, and which they never passed without a longing gaze into the interior court beyond. The massive winged doors of carved wood were thrown wide open to-day, though usually only a small door inserted in one leaf of the large doors gave eye or foot access to the paved hall inside.

PEACE

The charmed eyes of the children rested upon the frescoed walls and rough stones of the hallway for but a moment, and swiftly passing the stone seat near the door, where the porter sat reading his master's morning paper, they fell upon a charming scene beyond. The court was separated from the outer hall by a graceful latticework of iron, a thing of beauty in itself, bearing in the midst of its scrollwork the names of José, María, and Jesús, curiously wrought and gilded, upon its three divisions. Beyond the lattice was the court or inside garden of the house. Lovely trailing vines hung downward from the columned corridor of the upper story, and were festooned about the iron latticework, and tall palmetto plants and japonicas in earthen tubs were arranged against the background of white walls.

A fountain played musically among the flowering plants which were so arranged that the marble group in the midst was not hidden from view. This group formed the center of attraction for the children. It may have represented an infant Moses in the ark of reeds, for a dimpled marble baby reposed in a marble basket on a mossy island in the

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

center of the basin, and over him stooped a fair-faced girl with an arm outstretched in sisterly protection. Neither Amada nor her sisters had ever heard of the Hebrew baby in the river of Egypt, yet they loved the pretty white figures among the green plants, and never failed to greet them in passing. The heat and the weariness were all forgotten now as they stood before the gaping doors.

"The water sounds like rain falling, Amada, and it sprinkles the girl and the baby all over," Consuelo remarked thoughtfully.

"The palmetto is like a parasol," Amada returned; "see how it spreads over the baby's head."

"Ana is not a baby any longer," Consuelo went on gravely, looking from the quaint little figure at her side to the white marble boy inside. "Why do we not call the marble baby Herculano, now, Amada?"

"Well, we will," Amada assented carelessly.

"It isn't Herculano!" Ana wailed, shutting her eyes tightly and growing red in the face. "It has been Anita all the time. I shall not call the baby Herculano, and I'll make the Spaniard come and get Consuelo this very night, when it's dark!"

PEACE

"*Caramba!* and what's all this?" growled a hoarse voice close by, and the tall porter rose suddenly and pounced upon — no, *not* upon the children, for at the first word from behind the fierce mustachios of the Spaniard's servant, they had scampered off like frightened kittens, around the corner of the street.

"Such a pest!" the man muttered as he returned to his seat. "These Cuban youngsters are like mosquitoes, everywhere they are not wanted. A dozen times already this morning have I had to drive the creatures from the door. The Señor Ramirez need not have ordered the doors opened so early to give me all this trouble." Then, as a church clock near by chimed the hour of eleven, he added, "but it is high time the flowers arrived. I must send another messenger."

Meanwhile the children had not loitered another moment along the way, and soon arrived breathless and hot at the walled garden of their father's care. Without difficulty they found Pablo, for the small door in the wall was standing ajar, but it was some moments before Amada could gain his attention.

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Here and there, in the midst of flower beds and paths, a palm tree lifted its plummy head of deep green foliage upon its stately gray stem. Pablo stood in a path directing one or two negroes in the cutting of great branches of bloom from the heliotrope shrubs, the stout crimson geranium plants, and the oleander trees. These negroes were in their turn heaping the rich masses of color and fragrance upon the outstretched arms of two black boys in waiting.

Pablo's voice was crusty and his face scowling. This act of despoiling his treasures, upon which he had expended so much toil and loving care, that the breakfast of a grandee's guests might be garnished with bloom, was more than he could bear with fortitude. He knew that in a few hours all this beauty would be reduced to a wilted mass of dying petals and leaves, to be cast out in disdain and trodden under foot in some garbage heap. What right had the Señor Ramirez to appropriate Doña Carmen's property for his own use? For Doña Carmen was a loyal patriot; besides, ever since her last words to him, on her departure for New York one year ago, Pablo had considered

PEACE

the beautiful sequestered garden as his own. Doña Carmen had said :

“You will care for my garden as if I were here, Pablo. It is as yours while I am gone, and no one shall despoil your plants without a written order from my major-domo.”

So she had spoken. Yet the rich Spaniard, Ramirez, was a judge, and Pablo knew that it must go ill with those who opposed his will, so he had submitted to the required written order for spoliation, although with the worst grace in the world. As Amada finally stepped nearer and plucked his sleeve, Pablo and his man had come to a bed of magnificent tuberose, creamy white and rose-tipped on their tall, healthy stalks.

“Yes, the Señor said particularly that he must have the tuberose, every one of them,” one of the black boys declared with a saucy grin, as Pablo hesitated before them. “Does not the paper say so?”

Pablo crushed the major-domo’s order in his hand, then dropped the paper and ground it under his slippered heel.

“If my tuberose must go, then I leave not one flower in all the garden,” the peppery

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

Pedro cried, his lips pale with passion. Snatching his sleeve from Amada's grasp, he wheeled about and began snipping with reckless hand up and down the beds, until even his shears creaked remonstrance, and the negro boys stood agape with astonishment.

At an inauspicious moment when her father paused to gaze back upon the destruction in his wake, Amada ventured to give her news and to prefer her request.

"May all the fish in the sea perish like the flowers lying there, before I spend a *real*¹ upon cousin or grandfather, this day!" Pablo declared gloomily, glancing down upon the shrinking figures of the younger girls, who, finger in mouth, clutched Amada's skirts in fright at their father's violence.

"And what shall I say to mamá?" Amada asked boldly, holding her ground. "There is nothing but the onions for dinner —"

"Good enough for us, good enough for Plácido!" the gardener returned briefly, snapping his shears as if he would fain clip off the kinky head of the negro boy, standing by. "Tell thy mother so, and be

¹ About twelve and a half cents Cuban money.

PEACE

off, that I may finish this morning's beautiful work!"

"Papá's rheumatism has come," sighed Consuelo dolefully, as they trailed homeward. "It always comes with the rains. *Ay de mí*, how cross he was!"

CHAPTER II

My thoughts are turned on peace :
Already have our quarrels filled the world
With widows and with orphans.

ADDISON.

THE recollection of the newly arrived cousin at home hastened the steps of the children as they fled in dismay from the garden.

Once more they passed the great house of the judge, but this time on the opposite side of the street. Nevertheless, as they reached a point in front of the huge entrance doors, their feet were again stayed on the burning paving stones, and their eyes again searched the cool interior beyond the lattice for a parting glimpse of the fountain amid the greenery. Even Ana kept silence at this critical moment, for the fierce porter again sat reading the newspaper on the bench, and at any moment might spring forth upon them.

PEACE

There was a fascination in the very nearness of the enemy, and their hearts beat wildly as they paused in breathless silence. Before they moved on, a negro lad appeared at the corner of the great building and turned in at the open doors, his arms laden with flowers, flaming fuchsias and geraniums, odorous heliotrope, glowing cannas, variegated lilies and — yes, and waxen tuberose on their stately stalks!

“Look, those are papá’s flowers!” Ana cried in an eager whisper. “The judge is going to have them all, Amada. And there is the other boy, also! How angry papá must be!”

“Hush, Anita! Quick, let us run; the Spaniard is coming!” Amada cried, catching her little sister’s hand, and darting down the street with Consuelo close at her heels. The porter of the Señor Ramirez had indeed advanced toward the doors, but his mind was now too much concerned with the tardy arrival of the flowers to be occupied with the little ones over the way.

“There! I’ve done it twice to-day!” Amada muttered in a low tone, to herself, as the three subsided into a walk at a safe dis-

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tance from the judge's house. "Never, never, will I do it again!"

"What, Amadita?" Consuelo asked curiously, watching her sister in some concern, as Amada with head drooped, moved silently along at her side, still holding Ana's hand. But Amada only shrugged her shoulders and made no reply to Consuelo, who knew better than to press her sister with an unanswered question.

There was a gleam of even unusual brightness in Amada's eyes, after that, although she did not speak another word for the rest of the way home.

It was pleasant to enter the cool house, at last, and rest their tired legs on the stone bench. And it turned out that Helena had so far improved the long hour of the children's absence as to have heard all that Plácido was for the present disposed to tell her of the town gossip of Limonar, so that the cousin was quite at liberty to be questioned by the little ones. Then it was that Amada heard of the snow-white pigeon awaiting a visit from her at the small fruit farm of Plácido's father.

"He will eat out of your hand," Plácido

PEACE

assured her, "and he will be a beauty when fully grown. Also, there is a small pig, which follows my mother about the house, and lies down to sleep at her feet, like a kitten. You shall have the pig, also, Amada, when you come to stay with us."

Amada's eyes sparkled. While Consuelo and Ana were like their father in his adoring love for flowers, she cared most for active, breathing pets which could love her back again. Once, on a former visit, Plácido had brought to her all the way from the farm, beyond Matanzas, a live, speckled chicken, and this chicken had been the joy of her heart, until it had been sacrificed for her father, one day, when the rheumatism had been very bad, and he had "fallen into bed", as the Spanish has it. But though the other children had willingly enough sipped the remains of the broth secretly left for them in the pot by the kind-hearted Micaela, the thought of such a thing sickened the soul of Amada. Not one drop of the broth made from her tame pet would she taste, and it is a question whether Amada has ever been induced, since that time, to swallow broth of chicken.

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"It is partly for you that I have come to Havana," Plácido whispered into Amada's ear, when Consuelo and Ana were not listening and his cousin Helena had gone to the kitchen. "Your mother has not yet allowed me time to speak of my own concerns, but after a while, little one, you shall hear it all. Would you like to go back with me out of this noisy city, to the country where the guavas drop from the trees into our hands, and the birds nest in the roof-thatching? I will teach you to make cages out of reeds, and we will snare the great fire beetles, and pets you shall have to your heart's content. Ah, yes, I have heard of the poor little chicken, dear one, and I promise you no broth shall be made of the pigeon, the pretty, plump, lily-white pigeon waiting for you!"

So enchanted was Amada with Plácido's plan that she could only beam shyly upon him without reply, but he was convinced by the look upon her face, and the nervous movements of her slender little fingers in twisting and untwisting the ends of the draw-string about her waist, that Amada's consent to his purpose was more than half gained.

When Helena returned from the kitchen,



"I will teach you to make cages out of reeds, and we will snare the great fire beetles." Page 22



PEACE

she sent Amada to take care of the baby in the court, while she resumed her conversation with Plácido. Consuelo and Ana had meantime succumbed to weariness and sleep, tumbled one upon the other in an angle of the great stone bench, deaf and blind to all that went on around them.

For some time, Herculano had been fretting in his "cradle", and as Amada lifted him from the swinging box, he gurgled and smiled his pleasure. The child was thinking little of her brother, however, as she passed through the kitchen and out into the little court. Micaela nodded to her as she passed and said in her thick, slow tones: "Good Amadita, carry baby. Give Amadita eat bread after awhile."

Under the orange tree there was a circle of flowerpots containing slips of plants, which Pablo was cherishing on his own account. In the farthest corner was a heap of rubbish and garbage giving out an unpleasant odor, as it lay reeking in the hot sunshine, waiting to be carted away some day, perhaps *mañana* (to-morrow). But, as Amada had lived all her life in Havana, she was too well used to bad odors to heed those just about her. She

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

sat down on the bare ground, and cuddling Herculano in her arms, she swayed to and fro there on the edge of the shade cast by the orange tree, till the baby's wee black head nodded in sleep. Amada fell to stroking the little bare feet and legs as if she loved them, for was not Herculano almost as nice a pet as a chicken that could follow her about and cluck at sight of her?

Ah! but the snow-white pigeon! How even sweeter would be such a pet than a speckled chicken! She knew well the cooing note of the pigeon, for, in the market place, she had seen many for sale, crowding each other in their baskets and treading awkwardly on their own pink toes. And the little pig! Pigs, roaming at will in the houses of the negroes and the more shiftless Cubans in the worst parts of the city, along with the donkey, mule, or horse of the family, were also a familiar sight to Amada, but the pig as a pet, perhaps to be cuddled in one's lap, as even now she was cuddling the baby! Was it a black pig or white, and was its tail curly or straight? Of course, it squeaked and grunted. Yes, babies cried, chickens clucked, pigeons cooed, and pigs squeaked.

PEACE

How still Herculano was, asleep now in her arms, and how heavily drooped her own eyelids! There! Amada herself was dozing, leaning against the yellow-washed wall, and the flies went buzzing by to get their dinner from the garbage heap, and the sun, standing directly overhead, beamed down upon the little nurse and baby, adding a warmer color to the already sun-tinged cheeks.

Meanwhile, since what food there was in the house need not be prepared until late in the afternoon, Helena chatted unceasingly with Plácido. He knew his cousin Helena well, and had learned that — as he would have said of Rose, the donkey at home — if he let her have her head for a time, he would be able to get in a word for himself after awhile. So, after she had learned all he could tell her of old friends in the neighborhood of Limonar, Plácido found a loophole for introducing his project concerning Amada. Helena had already learned of the rheumatism of Salomé, Plácido's mother, and her only surviving aunt. This rheumatism was gradually crippling poor Salomé's hands and knees, and what was to be done with two cripples in the house, and no one to wait upon them but Plácido

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

himself, whose occupation it was to cultivate the small fruit farm?

Ever since his marriage with Salomé, long years before, Juan Ruiz, the husband, had been employed on Sundays and holidays about the bull plaza of Matanzas, until one sunny Sunday afternoon, when Plácido was just passing out of his teens. On that day, Juan was helping other men to haul the slaughtered horses out of the arena, when he had received a convulsive kick from one poor, dying animal, seemingly already dead. Juan had been in the act of tightening the noose of rope slipped over the creature's body, and received the kick just at the hip joint, which was hopelessly crushed. For three years, therefore, he had suffered, on his back, though it had been possible for him to be moved, ere many months, to the small farm near Limonar which he rented from a neighboring Spanish planter. The clever old man, having been in his youth a gardener, like Pablo, was still able to advise Plácido as to the planting and cultivation of his fruit trees and vegetables.

Now, however, as has been said, Salomé was partly laid by with her rheumatism, and the old negress sometimes employed by her

PEACE

about the house could be ill afforded. If, as was Plácido's modest proposal, they might only borrow Amada for awhile, there was much a child might do, in tending the two invalids, yet Plácido lost no time in earnestly assuring his cousin that the child should not be overworked, and that there would be time and to spare for wandering over the farm with him, and for cherishing a menagerie of pets.

Helena laughed aloud at the idea of Amada working her "lazy little self" too much, anywhere, and she did not seem displeased with the idea of letting the child go. Perhaps she was thinking of the time when Amada would return, when there would be much news to be heard of the old neighborhood and of her aunt, news which a girl could give much better than a country youth like Plácido. She could only promise, however, that when Pablo should return home in the afternoon for dinner, she would submit the matter to him for decision.

"My husband thinks no child in Cuba quite so clever as our Amada," Helena added complacently. "It is true, she does no work, but what would you have? Micaela does it all, and there is nothing left for Amada. She is a strong little thing, and bold! Ah, Plácido,

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

you should see how she hates the Spaniards! 'Little Cuba libre,' my Pablo calls her."

"As for me," said Plácido, in his pleasant, soft drawl, "I do not hate them so —"

"And you would not see Cuba free?" flashed the woman, with extraordinary vigor.

"I would not see Cuba laid waste with fire and sword," Plácido replied, still quietly, "and our women and babies starving."

"Little you know of women and babies!" laughed Helena.

"But I know of Spain, and of our last struggles. I cannot remember 'the ten years' war', certainly, having been born in the midst of it, but one hears of its horrors, even now."

"What, then, would you have? Are you a coward, Plácido?"

"Who knows?" he returned, shrugging his shoulders expressively. "I sometimes think; that is all. There is a better way, perhaps, than to fight. Let Spain give Cuba's government into her own hands, as has been long half-promised —"

"Autonomy! My own cousin an *autonomista*!" and Helena fairly shrieked the words.

Again the peaceful Plácido shrugged his shoulders, but he said no more, as Helena was

PEACE

called off to the kitchen, and the conversation ended for a time.

When the master of the house returned from his work, he looked as if he had "received a stroke." So the wife expressed it to the large-eyed, melancholy Micaela, as the two women hastened to prepare the late dinner. A smoking stew of onions and tomatoes, served in the earthen dish in which it had been cooked, was presently placed on a reed mat laid on the ground in the court, and the family disposed themselves upon the ground around the dish, with feet tucked out of the way. There were small saucer-like dishes of coarse ware, one for each, and in these Helena served portions of the stew, helped with a wooden spoon. Bits of a coarse hard-baked bread were used to convey the contents of the dishes to the mouth, and a simpler manner of feeding could scarcely be invented. Then, there would be no washing of knives and forks for the patient Micaela after dinner, although we may say that a new utensil was used with each mouthful!

Pablo was more silent than usual, and played moodily with his bread, breaking it into crumbs far too small to be used as "spoons,"

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

until Helena was fain to rebuke him sharply. When he raised his eyes to her face, at her words, and looked at her as if in a dream, she felt, as she also confided to Micaela, cold chills run up and down her spine, so unlike Pablo were the silence and the meekness.

When the stew was all consumed, however, and they had risen from their lowly posture to stretch their limbs, Pablo's tongue was loosened. He and his guest took their seats on the stone bench in the hall, while the children played outside the door in the sunset light.

"The Señor Ramirez gave a breakfast, at noon to-day, to 'the conservative press of Spain'," Pablo said slowly, as he watched Plácido light a cigarette with a tiny match of wax. "Thanks! I have no heart for smoking. Yes, did the *niñas* (girls) tell you? And not one blossom remains in my flower beds, not so much as one jessamine star!"

Plácido looked hard at his cousin, with the soft, intelligent eyes of a patient dog. His full, red lips were closely pressed upon his cigarette, while both hands rested upon his knees. This expectant attitude was rewarded as no questioning would have been.

PEACE

"Yes, as he would have the rarest and best, I sacrificed them all. *Ay de mí!* Plácido, you should have seen my tuberoses, the tallest, the sweetest, the most perfect in all the city!"

"Was it wise, cousin?" the young peasant asked, pausing in his smoking, his cigarette held between his slender brown fingers, and speaking in his ever gentle fashion.

"Wise to yield all, where one must yield one's best? Why not? One does not think of wisdom, when one's heart is crushed!" The elder man spoke with more spirit than had before appeared in his manner. Then, shaking his head slowly, he fell to pulling to pieces a wilted flower-bell, taken from the bottom-hole of his blouse. "I am all upset, and my head is dazed." He faltered uneasily. "I cut all the buds too, Plácido, along with the full-blown flowers. The beds are no longer beautiful. Never before have they been bare of flowers. They will bloom again, after awhile, you say! But what is to prevent their being again shorn for a Spaniard's breakfast table? Why should they bloom again to delight, for a moment, the gaze of the enemy and the tyrant?"

But serious as were Pablo's words, his tone

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

was anything but fierce, and there was a mechanical ring in his voice that alarmed even Plácido. He attempted to change the subject, therefore, by recalling to his cousin's mind the plan of Amada's visit to the country, which had been barely mentioned at dinner. As then, it seemed impossible now to arouse any interest in the father's mind on this subject, and he presently rose restlessly, to stroll out into the street, waving his hand with a gesture of dignified sorrow toward his wife and Amada, now standing near, as if to say that in such small affairs as the disposal of their children, Helena was the one fittest to be consulted, while his own mind was so weighted down by graver cares. And he shuffled off down the street, brooding regrets over the despoiled garden filling the gray head bowed under the broad palm-leaf hat.

Pablo's manner was so unlike his customary peevishness upon being crossed in any matter that Helena wrung her hands as he passed out of sight.

"His spirit is broken!" she wailed. "The cloven foot has been set in my husband's garden, and he will never be a man again. Death take the Spaniard!"

PEACE

"Softly, cousin!" interposed Plácido, gently drawing Amada to his side. "You should be more careful of your words. The children will hear and repeat them! The Spaniards own our country."

"But not our tongues!" snapped the woman fiercely.

"Yet Cuba is not yet *libre* (free) to speak what she will!" her cousin added.

"Come, let me tell you, if I were a man like you, cousin, I would fight the Spaniards!" Amada interposed eagerly.

"Why, what have they done to you, little one?" Plácido asked, smiling down into Amada's glowing face, where her black eyes were snapping sparks of indignation.

"Do you not know, indeed?" the child asked, opening wide her beautiful, blazing eyes. "I forgot," she added "you are from the country, and have not been here for a long time. Let me tell you, cousin. Consuelo and I were returning from the Señora Deuda's one day, with the money for mamá's sewing, oh! many weeks ago, and as we were quietly walking along, an officer came galloping up behind us on a big white horse. Consuelo is a very silly child, sometimes, and instead of

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

keeping close at my side then, where I should have protected her, she looked behind, and gave a little cry, thinking the horse was upon us, and then she ran toward the other side of the street. The officer rode right over my little sister, cousin, in the very middle of the street, and when I shook my fist at him, and screamed to him to stop, he only laughed aloud, and called over his shoulder, as he galloped on, that it was all her fault. *Virgen purísima!* I thought she was killed, poor little Consuelo!"

"But was it not partly her fault, Amadita?" Plácido asked with pacific intent. "You yourself called her 'silly'."

"What kind of a man are you, cousin?" the little girl asked in indignant amaze. "Come, Consuelo, and show our cousin the mark of the great cut on your leg made by the captain's horse!"

CHAPTER III

What is youth? — A dancing billow,
Winds behind and rocks before.

WORDSWORTH.

“**D**O as you please with Amadita, Helena. She will be safe with Salomé, and there will be one less mouth to feed in this house, for a time. Who knows how long we are to be patient, and when patience ends, then war!” Pablo had awakened, less hopeless and dismayed, on the morning succeeding the day upon which he had desolated his flower beds, and thus spoke with his wife, while she packed his breakfast pail with boiled rice. He was about to leave home for his work, for gardens must be tended though private grievances gnaw at the roots of the flowers, and as it was still early, the late breakfast hour of the tropics would find him under the palms and mangoes of the garden. From thoughts of his child, he had swiftly returned to his grievance, which was akin to the grievances

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

of thousands like him in Havana, as well as in the uttermost parts of the island. Yet there was determination in his eye, where yesterday there had been despair, and he departed presently, leaving encouragement in the heart of his wife.

"Amada shall go, then," Helena thought to herself, as she sat on the stone bench, nursing Herculano. "Micaela can wash her clothes to-day, and I shall go to the shops and buy stockings and shoes for the child. Her feet would be bleeding in her worn sandals before ever she could set foot on Juan's land. How fortunate that my sewing goes home this morning! Ah, Amada, thou art awake at last!" And the child stood in the doorway of the sleeping-room, rubbing her eyes.

"But where is my cousin, mamá?" Amada demanded in dismay, with a glance at the bench where Plácido had slept.

"Gone to the market, to be sure. Perhaps to see whether he can find yams or pomegranates so fine as his own. But go to Micaela for a piece of bread, child, and then hurry off with Doña Isabel's sewing. She will pay thee, and I shall buy thee with the money a pair of slippers, if thou art good."

PEACE

"Mamá! am I then really to go with Plácido?" Amada fairly screamed, in her delight throwing herself upon her mother, and disturbing the baby at his breakfast.

"There, foolish one, go and do as thou art bidden!"

"Not until you tell me truly what my papá has said. You said that he would decide to-day, mamá!" Amada, with these bold words stood obstinately before Helena with her hands clasped behind her back.

"Well, yes, little plague, thou art to go, and to-morrow thy cousin departs. Wilt thou hasten now, and do thine errand?"

Amada, needing no further bidding, crept softly past the door of the room where her little sisters still lay sleeping, and demanded bread of the slow moving Micaela.

"Quick, before the *niñas* awake!" she exclaimed, "I must go quickly, and Anita always lingers behind Consuelo and me. Why, Micaela, what is the matter with your eyes? Have you gotten red pepper into them again, poor thing?"

Micaela's eyelids were indeed reddened, and the corners of her mouth drooped even more than usual. Laying her hand on

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

Amada's head, she attempted to smooth the roughened black locks which had not yet been put in order.

"Amada going away! Poor Micaela! Stay, Amadita, and don't leave Micaela and the baby!"

"I am just going to carry the shirts to Doña Isabel, Micaela. Why should you cry about that? Oh, you are thinking of our cousin. Yes, Micaelita, I am going away, to-morrow, but Consuelo and Anita and the baby will stay with you. *Adios!*" and the light-hearted child tripped out and away, only pausing long enough to receive the bundle of finished sewing from her mother.

Micaela turned from the door and sat down disconsolate in the middle of the courtyard. Fixing her large, heavy eyes on the blue sky arching above the city, she clasped her hands about her knees and sighed mournfully.

"Mother of God! Micaela does not wish Amadita to go away. Micaela will die when the sunshine goes away!" she murmured. The girl shivered with the grief which her hesitating words so poorly expressed, then bowing her head upon her knees, she remained motionless on the ground until aroused by

PEACE

her aunt who hastened to surrender the baby to her, now that Plácido was seen approaching from the market place.

Meanwhile, just as Consuelo and Ana were waking from their morning naps, Amada was hurrying on light feet past the windows of a fashionable restaurant, where, early as it was, a number of foreign tourists were breakfasting. A peal of laughter from within arrested the girl's footsteps as she passed the last window, and she paused to stare inside between the iron bars. At her side hovered an old crone, ragged, haggard, and grim, with nose meeting chin, and sunken black eyes on fire with desire.

"Look, there's a picture for you, Mr. Case!" cried a lady of the party, pointing toward the pair outside the window, and close at hand. "What horrible old age one sees here, and what lovely childhood, sometimes. See the ancient creature's claws clutching the window bars, and the wild look in her eyes!"

The lady spoke in English, and the two standing outside understood not a word, but it was not difficult for either to comprehend the offer of two bananas through the bars. Amada received hers with a rather shy acceptance, yet she rewarded the giver with a brilliant

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

smile and a flash of her dark eyes so captivating that the strange lady would doubtless have added both oranges and bursting pomegranates to her gift, had Amada not tripped smilingly away, peeling her banana as she went. Meantime, the old beggar was devouring hers hungrily, mumbling something to the effect that the *gringos* (foreigners) should know better than to take milk with their coffee while eating fresh fruit, at this sickly season.

"Misery and death, and a grave in the strangers' place," she muttered, as she hobbled on to another window.

Soon Amada came in sight of the harbor, the beautiful, ill-smelling harbor of Havana, where the blue waves sparkled in the early beams of sunshine and merrily tossed the row boats already plying busily among the barges and ships anchored to the buoys.

At this hour, the streets were alive with people, men sauntering along to their work, wearing loose white cotton trousers belted over coarse shirts, low-heeled slippers upon their sockless feet, and wide-brimmed, high-crowned palm-leaf hats on their heads. The women abroad were all of the lower class, on their way to and from market, and carried

PEACE

small baskets on their arms. The well-formed bronzed features of all, and the straight black hair, showed Spanish blood, but most of this working class now thronging the narrow streets were Cubans born and bred. Besides these, there were barefooted negroes here and there, dressed as were the Cubans in most respects and seeming very much at home in this land of their forced adoption.

Naked negro babies sprawled in the sun about the doorsteps of houses along the way, with tall lean pigs and scrawny roosters as playfellows, but fewer and fewer of these were seen as Amada left the narrow streets and entered the wide Calzada del Cerro. This avenue leads for a league southward out of the city, and is bordered by hedges of the aloe and the Spanish bayonet, while here and there stretch the villa gardens and orchards of wealthy citizens, with fruit trees waving above the walls. The paving of the avenue was rough and broken, the way was long, and no rain clouds as yet dimmed the fierce brightness of the sun's rays.

The Señora Deuda's house was a small suburban villa on the Calzada, having ample grounds of its own, verdant with foliage and

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

brilliant with flowering plants. As Amada at last reached the iron wicket, beside the closed carriage gates set in the stuccoed wall surrounding these grounds, three tinted butterflies darted in past her, and fluttered on in front for several yards, as if bent upon showing the dusty little feet their way up the avenue of royal palms leading to the house. White, yellow, and pinkish brown were the colors of the pretty creatures, and Amada forgot her tired feet and burning shoulders as she trod the white driveway behind the gay flutterers. Presently, however, they danced away out of sight in the cool shade on one side of the avenue, and Amada was left to find the rest of her way for herself, which, if the butterflies had only known it, was far better known to her than to their own dainty selves.

There, just ahead, stood the white house, long and low, with a whirl of white columns supporting the tiled roof of the verandah. But when Amada reached the front, she did not cross the verandah to the front entrance, shaded by a flexible reed curtain from the morning sun. Instead, she passed around toward the back, where, in the shade of an arbor, sat a lady dispensing orders to a lean,

PEACE

grave-eyed Cuban who stood respectfully before her rustic chair. A basket of keys was set on a table at her side, and at her feet squatted a twelve-year-old negro boy clad in a scant frock of brilliant yellow calico. The dwarfish brown creature looked up at Amada, standing silently behind the overseer, and grinned delightedly, making vehement gestures for her nearer approach. The air was heavy with the scents of jessamine and oleander, from the thicket of vines and shrubbery surrounding the arbor.

As the overseer turned away at last, bearing a huge key in his hand, the lady looked down over her triple chin and spied the antics of the boy at her feet. Rapping him sharply on the head with the lead pencil in her hand, she followed with her eyes his pointing fingers, and spied Amada, shrinking a little behind a tub holding an oleander tree in full pink blossom.

Now, Amada was somewhat in awe of the fat housekeeper of the Señora Deuda, who fitted so snugly into her big armchair in the arbor that the little girl, having never seen her out of it, wondered if she *could* get out at all. Nor was she at ease in the presence of the negro

LITTLE [CUBA LIBRE

boy, the uncouth pet of fat Doña Isabel. He showed his strong, white teeth in too capacious a grin, and his strange gestures and the uncanny sounds proceeding from his throat made him an object almost of dislike to the little girl. Cristóbal Colon (Christopher Columbus), born deaf to sound, and therefore dumb, as far as intelligible speech was concerned, was the grandson of one of the former slaves of the Deuda family, and had been brought up about the great house from infancy. Perhaps no one besides the housekeeper, Doña Isabel, found anything attractive about the impish-looking child, big-bodied, big-headed, and feeble-legged, but it is certain that there was the best kind of an understanding between these two, and no one could run the lady's errands about the house and premises with more promptness and zeal than the little Cristóbal, who interpreted her signs and obeyed them as readily as if they had been spoken communications. Nor was there lack of sympathy between them, for now, at the smart touch of the lead pencil upon his nappy head, Cristóbal buried his face in the folds of Doña Isabel's white cambric skirt and whimpered. Thereupon the lady dropped her pen-

PEACE

cil, and drew her voluminous skirts protectingly about the little creature so that only the top of his head remained visible, while she again looked sharply in Amada's direction.

"Oh, it is the child of the woman who sews!" she exclaimed in a deep, masculine voice, recognizing Amada. "Come here, girl, with your bundle, and do not brush against my oleanders. Be quiet, Cristóbal, and stop clutching my dress. I thought it could be nothing less than a traveling monkey-man to so upset thee. There! move off my feet," and as she spoke, Cristóbal rolled over upon the bare ground, impelled by a not too gentle movement of his mistress' slippered foot. Then he sat up on the sand, staring at Amada, one forefinger stuck between his thick, red lips, and both legs bowed beneath his body.

Amada stepped past him, and pretended not to notice as he plucked at her dress, but she stood close beside Doña Isabel, on the side farthest from Cristóbal while the lady opened her bundle and examined the work critically.

"It is well done," she said at last; "the button-holes are strong, and the shirts will last the longer for Helena's sewing. Here, thou lazy little dog, take the key and bring

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

me my wallet from the drawer in the office. Be spry, boy, and remember that my eyes can see straight through the walls of the house, and into thy very insides !”

Cristóbal scrambled to his feet, and, snatching the key from Doña Isabel’s hand with a grin, and with a fantastic roll of the eyes toward Amada, scampered into the house.

“Will he never learn to talk, Doña Isabel ?” Amada asked curiously, as the yellow frock disappeared behind the vines of the back verandah.

“When he is cured of his deafness,” was the brusque reply.

“When will that be ? When he is a grown man ?” Amada persisted. She had no real fear of a woman who was wedged into a chair, so long as her own feet were agile, and the gate at the foot of the avenue was unbolted !

“Never, until the blessed Virgin takes him to Paradise,” Doña Isabel returned. “He is of more use to me as he is. Why should he hear, only to listen to what is not his business to hear, and why should he speak, only to talk of that in which he has no concern ? He understands and obeys me, and that is all required of him.”

PEACE

"Is he then yours, your slave?" Amada asked next.

"Slave, child? Where are there any slaves in Cuba, now? No, he is no slave, but he is mine. His father gave him to me when his mother died, and I have fed him with my own hands since he was a baby. Certainly he is mine!"

"When he is a man will he obey you, Doña Isabel?" Amada asked wonderingly, as the impish-looking child reappeared, trotting from the house, holding the leather handle of the money-bag between his teeth, and grunting as he approached, flourishing the key in his black paws.

"When thou art a man, wilt thou obey me, Cristóbal?" Doña Isabel asked, smiling grimly into the strange, dark little face up-raised to hers with something like affection for her in the rolling black eyes. Cristóbal nodded briskly, as if perfectly understanding the question, then dropped upon the sandy ground, his thin legs collapsing under the weight of his unwieldy body. Doña Isabel counted out a number of coins into Amada's hands, and bidding her hold them tightly and not loiter along the way home, dismissed her

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

and returned to an open book of accounts lying on the table at her side. Amada gladly left the arbor, turning her back upon the strange pair inside, and taking great care not to brush her head against the oleanders stretching their luxuriant branches far and wide.

But, when quite out of sight of the keen eyes in the orange-tree arbor, she crept noiselessly toward a side window of the house, and paused lingeringly below the closed lattice.

The top of her head barely reached the slab of stone forming the window sill, so, even had the inner lattice been open, and the muslin curtains drawn aside, it would have been impossible for her bright eyes to see into the room beyond the lattice. There were no outer shutters to this window, nor was there need of any, for a fine old honeysuckle vine grew upon an arched trellis a few feet away, and stretched the stout brown ropes of its branches as a canopy quite to the balustraded roof above the window. Within the shadow cast by this vine, Amada stood breathless.

"If she would only speak once, or sing!" she thought, with upturned face and parted lips. "The beautiful Señora! I can no longer hate the Spaniards when I think of her!"

PEACE

But there was silence within the chamber, where the young widowed Spanish lady perhaps still lay dreaming upon her pillow, and outside the silence was broken only by the buzzing of insects about the perfumed, honey-laden goblets of the vine.

Suddenly, Amada felt a sharp nip at the calf of her leg, which so startled her that she almost screamed. At the same time a low chuckle sounded from near the ground at her feet, and her shrinking gaze downward met the unpleasant visage of Cristóbal Colon, who sat cross-legged among the weeds, puckering his face into alternate frowns and grins. Seeing that Amada remained motionless, indeed, she would have had to step over the little yellow-frocked figure to get away, Cristóbal pulled at the hem of her dress and pointed with vehement gestures down the avenue leading to the gates. Vexed by the boy's stealthy approach, which had detected her in no wrong act, it is true, but which had succeeded in frightening her not a little, and still indignant at the pinch administered by his strong, sly fingers, Amada recovered her usual boldness directly, and pushing the child quite out of her path, and so ungently that he tumbled over as at Doña

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

Isabel's touch a while before, she sped away down the avenue. Cristóbal's harsh cries of displeasure followed her as she left the house behind, but she hardened her heart against his wailings.

"He need not have tumbled over on his nose," she muttered, as the great palm trunks seemed to stalk threateningly alongside her, in her flight. "I wonder if Doña Isabel got up out of her chair to see what had happened to the ugly little thing. Ah! but he must have wakened the Señora," she cried aloud, stopping for an instant, and gazing backward over her shoulder, "and now I shall never, never see her again, for I dare not return, and to-morrow I go with Plácido, and who knows? she may die before I come home!"

But Amada was not one to grieve long over an unsubstantial ill, and presently, bethinking herself of the shoes and socks to be purchased with the money held fast in her moist palm, she entered the avenue and set out at a steady pace for home.

CHAPTER IV

The dewy paths of meadows we will tread.

DRYDEN.

AMADA had traversed more than half the distance between the Señora's villa and the streets of the city, when she heard a patter of hoofs behind her and a roll of wheels. A heavy rain the night before had partially laid the dust of the Calzada, so there was nothing to blind the eyes of the eager little girl as she stepped into the shade of a mango tree overhanging a garden wall to avoid a flashing vehicle drawn by a pair of cream-colored ponies as it rolled swiftly by in the direction of the city.

"*Ave María purísima!*" Amada murmured, laying one hand upon her beating heart. "It is she, my Señora! and she was not asleep!"

From the window of the high-hung closed coach, a lovely face glanced carelessly out upon the passers-by, a face lighted by a pair

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

of lustrous eyes, and crowned by a smart little bonnet of violet velvet set above the short curly fringe of hair in front. One bare hand resting on the window ledge held a posy of purple violets loosely in the grip of its jeweled fingers, and as the coach passed the little waiting figure under the mango tree, for some reason the fingers relaxed their grasp, and the violets fell to the ground. The swiftly turning wheels spared the blossoms, and Amada sprang to pick them up, holding them pressed to her bosom, while gazing ecstatically after the carriage. "The Señora, perhaps, saw me and meant the flowers for me," she said softly to herself. "She does not know that I love her, but perhaps she saw me smiling as she passed, and dropped the dear violets for me!"

The way seemed no longer endless now, and wings seemed fluttering at her brown little ankles as Amada fairly flew onward, the violets tucked inside the front of her chemise, and exhaling a rich fragrance as they rested in her warm bosom.

One other adventure attended the homeward way. On entering an alley-like street offering a short cut, Amada was sure she

PEACE

heard the sound of clear childish singing not far away. Nowhere, however, could she see the singers, though she stood still in the street and listened, turning her head, like a bright-eyed bird, this way and that, and looking intently into the faces of passers-by, who brushed carelessly along, deaf to the singing which Amada heard. Being passionately fond of music, and never before having heard the pleasing melody which came from close at hand, Amada still stood listening, although her small person served to blockade the narrow way to such a degree that a donkey boy and even the donkeys themselves turned to gaze at her in some astonishment.

“*Tonta!* (crazy thing), why dost thou stand sky-gazing in the middle of the way, forcing thy betters against the house walls?” a woman called harshly from a tipsy balcony above Amada’s head. The woman leaned lazily over the rusty balustrade, with a child on either side of her peering down into the street from between the bars.

“But what was it, Señora?” Amada whispered loudly, looking up into the woman’s mocking face. “I heard music, and now it is gone. It was like the singing of the choir-

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

boys, only sweeter. What could it have been?"

"Perhaps angels!" the woman retorted with a sneer on her handsome face, then, laughing aloud, she called across to a neighbor, who appeared on an opposite balcony. "The little *tonta*, down there, thinks angels have come to live in our street, Rosita! Shall I tell her what you and I call them, friend?"

By this time, Amada realized that the woman was making sport of her, and her heart beat so fast with anger that the quick blood glowed in her cheeks, and her eyes gleamed among the loosened waves of her hair.

"I want you to tell me nothing," she cried, shaking her clenched fist at the laughing Cuban faces above her. "I shall find out for myself what I wish to know!" And right then the music began again, brisker and louder than before. Amada darted a few steps farther on, and stopped before a door about which several men and children had gathered. Not content with standing behind and peeping past elbows and heads, Amada pushed her slim little body between a fat old man and a negro youth, and found

PEACE

herself in the narrow entrance hall to a house which very much resembled her own home. Back of this hall was a large, clean court and from this court came the sound of singing voices which had attracted her attention.

As she stole a little nearer the far end of the passage that she might more easily see the children gathered in the court, a young Cuban lady came out of an adjoining room, and seeing Amada, laid her hand upon the girl's arm.

"Come in, dear, and sing with the children," she said coaxingly. "They have been studying their lessons in the schoolroom until they are tired, and now they are resting."

"Are singing, and marching like soldiers, resting?" Amada asked wonderingly.

"We think so," smiled the lady; "will you not come in and see us, little girl?"

But enticing as the invitation was, Amada knew she ought not to stay, and besides, there was something unusual about this whole proceeding. Never before had she been invited into a schoolroom from the street. Men did not usually gather about doorways of schools and stare, as if a menagerie were inside. The passage was dark, the singing

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

had again ceased — on the whole it would not do for her to linger another instant! Turning to fly, she felt the lady's touch still upon her shoulder, and the soft tones of her voice arrested Amada.

"Then will you come again another day? Bring your little sister with you — you have a little sister, have you not?"

"Two, and a brother," Amada replied sedately, "but I cannot come again, because to-morrow I go to the country with my cousin Plácido, and who knows when I shall return? Perhaps, your school will not be here when I come back," she ended, a little regretfully.

"Who knows, indeed?" the lady replied. "Never mind, come and look for me when you do return, and — wait a moment," thrusting her hand into a bag hanging from her belt, "here is a picture for you. Can you read, child?"

"No? Then listen," and she read a few words printed on the card to Amada, wondering more, the longer she stayed in the shadow of the narrow hallway.

By this time she was in quite a fidget to be gone, but before sallying out into the

PEACE

street, she tucked the card into her bosom, with the violets, then with a gay backward look into the lady's face, she darted out into the sunshine again.

Now, to make up for lost time, she urged her tired feet swiftly onward, wondering what excuse she could make to her mother for having been such a long, long time away. Fortunately no excuse was needed, for Plácido had returned in the meantime, and Helena was being so well entertained that she merely stopped talking long enough to count the money brought home to her by Amada, then began again :

"The time grows short, Plácido, and when you are gone and Amadita also, there will be no one to talk with me the whole day long. Micaela is almost as dumb as Doña Isabel's black boy, whom Amada fears as she does the Spaniards."

"I, mamá? I do not fear the Spaniards. I hate them!" Amada cried from the corner of the bench where she sat panting, close at her cousin's side.

"But why, my soul?" Plácido asked, bending his head to look into Amada's heated face, resting against his sleeve.

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

"Because — no, I shall not tell you again," she answered indignantly. "You know as well as I about Consuelo's little leg and papá's flowers, and many, many other things!"

"There's a good lesson for you, Plácido *mio*," Helena exclaimed, laughing till her white teeth gleamed between her red lips. "Amada will teach you all you do not know of the tyrant. But, come, not one word have you told me of that good old man, the Señor Godinez, whose cane plantation was the richest in the island. He used to pat my head, and say that I would be a handsome woman some day, when I was still only a slip of a girl like Amada, sent to the big house to carry home the slaves' shirts and trousers my mother had made. He cannot be still alive?"

"Ah, no! and the cane plantation is twice as large. But his daughter, married to a Nuñez, lives in the old house —"

"The baby! The little blue-eyed, fair-haired Violeta? And married! How time flies, to be sure! And has she children, Plácido, like mine here — little stair-steps that they are!"

PEACE

"There are two, cousin, — Violeta the girl, older than Amada, and Claudio, a little younger. Ah! but they *are* children!"

"And shall I see your Violeta and Claudio when I go to the country?" Amada asked with keenest interest.

"If you are good, and don't rail so fiercely against the Spaniards," Plácido answered gravely.

"Are they Spaniards, then, cousin?"

"Surely, and the Señor Nuñez has lived in Cuba only since his marriage," Plácido replied, as much in answer to Helena's quick glance as to his little cousin's question. "It would not do for you to 'hate' the papá and mamá of Violeta and Claudio, my Amadita," drawing her closer to his side.

Amada looked thoughtful and said no more, while Helena went on questioning. And the child learned that the little home of her relatives was actually in sight of La Reseda, the old Godinez homestead, less than a league from the town of Limonar, and that her cousin was well acquainted with the young children, being often employed about La Reseda in pruning and treating the fruit trees and vines, when Violeta and

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

Claudio were sure to spend some moments of each day in his company. Her childish happiness was complete when Plácido confessed that he had already confided to the two children of the rich planter his hopes of bringing home with him a little cousin from Havana, and a promise of carrying her to La Reseda as soon as Salomé, his mother, should be able to spare her.

Amada lay down upon her canvas cot that night almost too excited to go to sleep. Foot-to-foot with her, at the other end of the cot, lay Anita, already asleep, and in another corner of the room slumbered Consuelo, next to Micaela's floor mat. The baby was resting in his mother's arms where she sat in the doorway of the court, bright with the light of the moon. In the shadow of the hall, at her side, lounged Pablo, sufficiently recovered from his despair to smoke his pipe again, and Plácido with a cigarette as usual between his finger tips.

Micaela crouched on the floor at Amada's side, and begged to be allowed to stroke her hands and head. Of all her little cousins, Micaela best loved Amada, perhaps because she was so brave and beautiful, afraid of

PEACE

nothing but dumb black boys and Spaniards' proud horses, and yet almost always amiable in her treatment of herself — the poor half-witted, "loved of God."

"Who will fetch the charcoal now, when poor Micaela is busy?" the latter asked dolefully.

"Consuelo, of course," was the prompt reply.

"Consuelo is very small and weak. And who will help Micaela sprinkle the floors?"

"Consuelo."

"Consuelo, always Consuelo! But who will love Micaela, poor stupid Micaela, and sometimes call her Micaelita?" This question ended in a wail, and Amada, grown sleepy during the monotonous colloquy, had to arouse herself and comfort the big girl, till the tears were dried, and the work-hardened hands had begun their strokings anew.

Long before the sun's round face appeared above the sea line in the east the next day, Plácido and his little charge had commenced their journey. All the farewells had been said, and Amada had tripped off in the gray morning light, holding fast Plácido's hand. Helena and Micaela were left behind in the

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

doorway with strangely grave faces, while the little girls stared with awed and still sleepy eyes after their sister, vanishing around a corner. Pablo had accompanied the travelers to the first corner, and had then shuffled off to his garden with a queer sensation in his heart each time he thought of his eldest daughter, who would not be at home to-day, nor who could tell for how many days, to welcome him on his return!

In one hand Plácido carried a bundle tied up in a very large handkerchief, containing a few changes of clothes for Amada, — and food for dinner, by the way; his other hand clasped Amada's protectingly as if he were the city cousin guiding a timid peasant child among the unaccustomed scenes of the capital! But to-day Amada was willing to be taken care of, and it was true that she was not used to wearing slippers and stockings, every day, along these familiar streets.

And here was the train! How delightful it was to be taking for one's first ride such a trip as the long leagues to Matanzas, with who could tell how many more from Matanzas to Limonar!

The travelers were so accustomed to rain

PEACE

at that time of the year that the heavy gray clouds spreading over the fields, as they steamed and rattled out of the city, did not oppress their spirits in the least. Still, it was a good thing to have arrived at the station with dry shoes, and after they were once seated in the car, they gave no thought to the threatening sky. Suppose the driving sheets of rain which presently began to sweep past the unglazed windows did shut off the view of foothills and fields, feathered with distant palm trees, were they not bound for the country, where the sun would surely shine on some days, and where birds sang in the thickets along the fields?

So Amada settled herself cosily at her cousin's side on the bare wooden bench of the car, and amused herself with eyeing her fellow passengers, and listening to Plácido's chat with a lank, bronzed farmer, likewise returning to his home in the cane-field district. The rain soon began to beat in at the car windows, and the slatted shutters had to be closed, producing a kind of twilight inside, which only made Amada's big eyes open wider and shine more brightly as she peered into her neighbors' faces.

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

Once in a while, the clankety-clank of the train paused for a few seconds, as it drew up at some wayside station, and above the noise of the puffing engine and the confusion of voices outside, could be heard the rush of wind and the heavy swishing sound of the rain.

The forenoon was far advanced before the train reached Matanzas, where Plácido and Amada changed cars for Limonar. By the time they were again started on their way, the rain had ceased, and though the country paths were still swimming in liquid red mud, at least the green leaves of bamboo and of mango were flashing in the sunlight, which had burst through the clouds, while the tall palms shook and rattled their plumed heads till every huge, ragged, jagged leaf of them sent a renewed shower of raindrops down upon the already drenched ground at their foot.

Never before had Amada seen quite so many palm trees, although accustomed to the sight of them in avenue and plaza at home. Sometimes, the royal palms stretched along a ridge, at a distance from the railroad, a single file of bare, straight, lofty stems topped

PEACE

by bunches of dark foliage, in clear relief against the pale sky; sometimes slanting cocoa palms gathered in friendly clumps about the low thatched roof of a peasant's hut; sometimes one royal tree lifted its solitary, slightly bulging trunk, graceful and gray, directly out of a green sea of waving cane, a bare space of ground for several yards surrounding its base, where the cane refused to grow.

Perhaps the wild flowers were all beaten to the ground, or hidden away under the leaves of rank weeds along the way, Amada thought, as no flashes of radiant color repaid her searching gaze as they jogged on between ditch and field.

"There must be flowers somewhere, cousin, for I smell the sweetness," she said once, as a wave of moist fragrance from some wild vine or shrub entered the window and struck full upon her little sniffing nose. And Plácido had smiled and suggested that along the railroad was not the place to look for the prettiest flowers. She must wait till he should have time some day to take her for a ramble toward the hills. Perhaps the Señora Nuñez would permit Violeta and Claudio to accom-

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

pany them some clear, cool day, on their small gray ponies, then he would show her wild flowers indeed, and even gorgeous ones growing high up and rooted to the very trunks and branches of trees!

After the train reached Limonar, there was a short pause in the shed of a station while Plácido removed Amada's shoes and stockings to let the little feet go bare through the red streets of the old town and out upon the red paths of the countryside. For everything and everybody thereabout was tinged with the deep red color of the earth, from the dingy train traveling every day through Cuban country ways, to the very babies reared in the wayside towns. Even the men who had sparsely filled the train along the way showed signs of the red color in their sallow complexions, and now, as Amada ran along at Plácido's side, up one of the streets of Limonar, she found the color-washed houses splashed with red, while pigs, geese, and chickens, — grunting, quacking and clucking out of their way, — were tinged with the ever-present dye.

"I also shall be red," she exclaimed breathlessly, trying to keep up with Plácido, who,

PEACE

now that he was nearing home, could scarcely restrain himself from taking long strides, hot and steamy as was the air, and muddy the rain-washed paths.

"There is water to wash with in the well," Plácido returned calmly, "and about our home it is not so bad as here, for we have grass growing up to the very doors. Patience, Amada, we are almost there."

Soon, after leaving the straggling streets of the town, great patches of waving green began to appear, and by and by, a mile or so farther along the road, Plácido pointed out to Amada a tall white chimney or two soaring above a huddle of roofs.

"That is the Señor Nuñez' *ingenio*,"¹ he explained. "You cannot see the family-dwelling for the thick cane growing in the way, but it stands just under two big mango trees, quite away from the engine-house and at least a mile from this road. Never mind, little one, do not think of Violeta now, for there is our house off on the other side, and — yes, my mother stands in the door, feeding the pigeons!"

An unaccustomed fit of shyness possessed

¹ Sugar factory.

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

Amada a little later, as she received the caressing welcome of her mother's crippled aunt and uncle, and her ready tongue was surprisingly still during the first moments inside the thatched adobe hut. But, little by little, she became her own hearty little self, and before the sun had slipped behind the ridge in the west, she was quite at home, and followed the halting steps of Salomé from place to place, the snow-white pigeon cuddled in her arms, and the curly-tailed pig grunting amicably at her heels.

CHAPTER V

A little lowly hermitage it was.

SPENSER.

IN the loving little soul of Amada there was no room for disappointment, even had there been cause for it, in the simple home of her peasant relatives. What did it matter to her if the house were very small and poor, and thatched with palm leaves, when there was the sweetness and freshness of all outdoors for sunny hours of the day, and a dry corner beside Plácido's work-bench in the shed, for the rainy times?

Always the wide fields and the sweep of sky, the weedy slope under the fruit trees, and the sweet, country smells were better than the narrow streets and unwholesome odors of the city, and there was so much to interest her in the new life that Amada never found herself wishing her visit at an end. Yet, she would have been very much amazed if any one had told her that she should never

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

again live in the yellow house in Havana, where the stone bench half filled the hall, and the orange tree grew in the court.

Of course, she did not forget one of the dear ones left behind, from Don Pablo to wee Herculano, but she only thought of them happily, not regretfully, as became her sunny disposition, being too well loved by her aunt and Plácido to lack for any homely care.

The child was not slow in proving herself the helper Plácido had known she would be, ere long learning to prepare the rice and the broth quite as well as Salomé's poor, knotted hands could have done. In so simple a life, as that led by the Cuban peasant, there are no intricacies of housekeeping fit to be mastered only by a woman grown, and as Plácido was almost always within call, there was little about the house which Amada's capable hands did not soon learn to accomplish.

With her cousin to draw the water from the well, and provide the charcoal or fagots for the kitchen fire, and even to make the fire on the queer grating set in the bricks, which formed the cooking-place, it was not difficult for Amada to do the rest. Perhaps Salomé was not over-particular about the

PEACE

sweeping of the earth floors, and the dusting of the scant furnishing of the two rooms. If this were so, it only made Amada's tasks lighter, and her feet less tired than they might have been for following Plácido's steps about his small patch of vegetables, and in the shade of his trees of mangoes, of guavas, and of lemons.

One evening, when Amada had been already a month with her relatives, she sat at Plácido's side in the moonlight outside the door of the house. Salomé and Juan had retired to their cots inside, and more than once the mother had called to Plácido to come in with Amada out of the moonlight, which would most certainly make them ill or unlucky. Plácido had silenced her at last by good-naturedly insisting upon having his own way.

"Be at rest, *mamá mia*," he had counselled her. "You are all wrong about the moon, for she will never harm Amada and me. The good God sends the night to cool and rest us, and I do not doubt he means the moon to help us enjoy it. It is too early for us to shut ourselves in the house, and besides I have scarcely seen Amada to-day, and have

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

much to tell her of La Reseda, so let us be!"

So the two cousins still sat in the clear light outside, a huge, seamed palm log, their seat, while Salomé held her peace upon her bed.

The full beams of the tropic moon turned the homely setting of the thatched hut into a picture of witching loveliness. They touched ragged roof and whitewashed wall, quivering leaf and scraggy shrub, with a silvery light, which, notwithstanding its sheen, concealed many a rustic blemish, only too candidly revealed by the glare of the sun by day.

Plácido leaned against the house wall as he sat on the log, with tired legs outstretched, and arms crossed upon his chest. The spark of the inevitable cigarette between his lips burned redly in the half light, casting a ruddy glow upon his clear-cut features which were shaded by the overhanging brim of his sombrero.

Amada's face, swept clear of shadow by the brilliant moonlight shining full upon it, was upturned earnestly to his. Her soft eyes, in the midst of the light upon her face, showed as black as the shadows lurking

PEACE

under the clump of banana trees in the near corner of the little orchard, and her red lips were parted in an expectant smile.

The cigarette at last burned out, and Plácido turned his eyes upon Amada and gently stroked the small, brown hand laid remindingly upon his knee. These two were fast friends, — the soft-voiced, gentle-spirited young man of the country and the bold-tongued, ardent little girl, — who was learning to respect the long silences of her big cousin and to wait patiently for the thought sometimes confided to her in his strong and picturesque words.

To-night, after finishing his last cigarette, Plácido told Amada of his day at La Reseda, the cane plantation of the Señor Nuñez, where the two Spanish children had plied him with questions as to the little cousin at home, and with reproaches for his failure to bring her to see them.

“They could not understand that you were needed at home, to-day, with your aunt unable to lift her arms to her head. ‘Such a little thing as thy Amadita?’ they said, when I told them what you had to do!” and Plácido laughed with quiet enjoyment.

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

"I suppose they are like all Spaniards, thinking they must have everything they wish!" Amada exclaimed with the gravity of an old woman, yet with a very girlish toss of her bare, black head.

"Always ready with a word against the Spaniards, even though the two little ones we are talking about are your cousin's friends!"

Plácido's words were good-natured enough and his mouth was smiling, but Amada quickly snatched her hand from his and clasped both her own tightly about her crossed knees. Also, she looked away from her cousin, up into the friendly face of the moon sailing overhead. Her own face wore no friendly expression now, and as she did not seem to wish to hear more of the Spanish children, Violeta and Claudio, Plácido with ready tact dropped his teasing tone and began speaking upon quite a different subject.

"I believe you have quite forgotten the little card you gave me to keep, Amadita."

The child turned her face toward him with one of her bird-like motions, but uncomprehending.

"Have you forgotten the little card the

PEACE

Señorita gave you on your last day in Havana? Do you not remember that you gave it to me to keep as we walked through the streets together, being fearful of its getting wet with the rain, in the bosom of your frock?"

"Ah, yes, cousin, I had forgotten. The pansies all in purple and gold were more beautiful than those in Micaela's pot in the court!"

"There are words besides on the card," the man continued, and drawing a small packet from his pocket, he opened it and took from the paper a card which he laid upon his knee. The gold in the heart of the painted pansies shone in the moonlight, and Amada stretched out an eager hand for possession of the card.

"Stay," cried her cousin softly. It was wonderful how soft could be the tones of the big man's voice. And he gently warded off the little hand. How gentle could be the touch of the work-worn fingers the dumb animals on the little farm might have told had their tongues possessed the speech of man.

"Stay, there is something besides purple and gold on the card. Perhaps you will not care for the flowers when I have told

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

you of the words written under them. Or, have you already read them, Amada?"

"I can read some book words," the child returned quickly, "but such letters as those I have never learned. I do not care about them, cousin. Let me have my picture."

"Surely, it cannot be expected of you that you should be able to read writing, little one. I meant no reproach. I, myself, had much ado to understand the words at first."

"And do you understand them now?" Amada asked carelessly, still eyeing the pretty card with more attention than she gave to her cousin's words.

"No — not — yet," Plácido answered musingly. "But I have read them, yes."

"Well, what do they say?" Amada demanded impatiently.

Plácido pushed back his palm-leaf hat, and the moonlight swept his face, grave now to solemnity.

"They are strange words such as I never heard before, Amada. You are more clever than I; perhaps you can help me understand them more perfectly. Though, mind, I do not believe you will like them!"

"Well!" more impatiently than ever.

PEACE

Without looking down at the card on his knee, though still guarding it from the grasping fingers of the girl at his side on the log, Plácido quietly repeated from memory, and very slowly, the words written in a small, even hand beneath the pansies :

*“ But love your enemies, and do them good, and lend, never despairing ; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be sons of the Most High : for He is kind toward the unthankful and evil.”*¹

“Who says such things : that we are to be kind to the Spaniards ?” Amada demanded quickly, as the last word fell from Plácido’s lips.

“I do not know,” was the quiet response. “And nothing is said about Spaniards, Amadita !”

“What a pity to have that nice little card spoiled !” the child cried vehemently. “Give it to me and let me tear it up. I did not know the lady was a Spaniard, or I should never have listened to a word from her, nor have let her touch me !”

“Yet you have told me of your violets dropped from the coach by the Señora Deuda ; have you thrown them away, little cousin ?”

¹ Luke vi : 35.

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

A wave of color dyed Amada's cheeks, and she jumped to her feet with a passionate gesture of her hands, which she flung out in front of her face, as if to ward off the teasing words which hurt her more than Plácido could have imagined. Then she thrust her hand into the bosom of her white chemise and drew it quickly forth again, grasping a small dried blossom or two. She uttered a sharp little cry as her fingers closed upon the dead flowers, and a glistening drop of blood oozed from her thumb as she looked fiercely down upon the telltale violets.

"Poor little one! Did the pin prick you, then?" the man asked, reaching for the passionate little hand that was even now crushing into dust what was left of the Señora Deuda's cherished posy of violets, which she had worn pinned to the little white garment.

"Let me alone! I shall not wear the flowers a minute longer. I do not love the Señora, either, even if she is beautiful, and calls me the prettiest Tiger Lily in all Cuba. I like best my papá's name for me, and I would rather be 'Little Cuba Libre' than any flower in a Spaniard's garden. There!" and Amada rushed by her cousin, brushing

PEACE

the card to the ground with a flirt of her blue cotton skirt, and disappeared into the darkened house.

"A Tiger Lily, to be sure!" muttered Plácido to himself, stooping to pick up the card, and to brush from its surface any speck of earth that might have soiled its fairness.

"What a vindictive little soul! It must be the living in a city that has made her so, and having Helena for a mother. Of course it is wrong [that the Spaniards should so crush out the life of our beautiful Island," he went on musing, while little by little, the shadow of the house wall engulfed him as the moon sailed toward the western hills. "But what can we do? What have we ever done before but bring more misery and want upon ourselves by struggling with the enemy. Always some are plotting to throw off the yoke, but what can handfuls of half-fed men lurking in the canebrakes do against trained Spanish troops? It is bad, but may it not be worse? We have our little homes now, where, years ago, smoke and flames streamed up into the face of the sky, and where again the fire may —" His hand clenched, and he shook his head mournfully,

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

the long black locks of his hair moving restively in the light breeze.

How Amada had resented the injury and insult to her little sister from the careless officer, while she herself had only received kindness, it appeared, from the one "enemy" of her acquaintance! And how she had sympathized with Don Pablo in his ill treatment by the Spanish judge! Could it be that he himself was suspected of cowardice and mean-spiritedness by this child, who was loved more by him for the very boldness and untempered zeal which he outwardly condemned? Ah! should grief come to any of the dear heads now pillowed under the brown thatching of palm leaves behind him, it would be a very different matter from the deeds of injustice and inhumanity to others, rumors of which often reached his unwilling ears in town and along the country roads. If a hair of Amada's black head should be harmed —

"Love ye your enemies . . . and ye shall be sons of the Most High: for He is kind toward the . . . evil."

Most impossible words, those first ones! Of course, the *Altísimo*, "the Most High,"

PEACE

meant God, the same God who directed the moon in her course, who lighted the sun and the stars, who filled the wild, sweet country with the living, growing things in which his peasant heart took innocent delight.

Once the priest from Limonar, on a rare visit to Don Juan, had spoken of God as the *Altísimo*, and he, Plácido, had stood with uncovered head and listened outside the open door. He had liked — not the priest nor his sleek manner — but the words of a blessing the priest had pronounced in absolving Don Juan, at the end of a private season of confession.

“Children of the Highest.”

Children of the God who made all beautiful things, yet who was kind to the unthankful — the hideous — and to the evil! Herein was a mystery, and the simple-hearted Plácido sighed with the puzzle of it all. He would go to bed, and forget in sleep words which ever since the card had been surrendered to his keeping by Amada had haunted many a waking hour of the peaceful countryman, who knew not that he had a personal enemy in the whole island of palm trees.

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

From that moonlit evening on the palm log, Amada for several weeks stoutly refused the occasional invitation of Plácido to accompany him to La Reseda. In those days there were many journeys back and forth between the farm hut and the mansion under the mango trees, for the fair lady of the house liked to have the gentle-mannered Cuban execute certain offices about the house and garden for which he was better fitted than the clumsier negroes or servile Chinamen in her husband's employment. The Señora, also, had heard of the clever child who had come to take care of Salomé, and she too had asked that she might have the pleasure — yes, she had actually used that word, Plácido assured his wide-eyed cousin — that she might have the pleasure of welcoming the little stranger sometime, when Plácido might find it convenient to bring her over to the plantation with him.

"I shall go with you the next time, to La Reseda," Amada said suddenly one afternoon to Plácido, as she helped him bind a quantity of cane stalks into bundles, convenient to be carried home on the back of Rosa, the donkey.

They had come across the red soil of the

PEACE

uncultivated fields to a bit of swamp land, perhaps a mile from home, where a wild canebrake shot a forest of stout, pale-green stalks into the air, and flourished myriads of slim pennants of deeper green above the tangle. The cousins were making a frolic of the expedition, for the bundles of canes were destined to be erected into a shelter for Amada's increasing family of pigeons, with a ground floor to be shared by the new brood of chickens, with a pair of snow-white rabbits. The donkey browsed placidly on the edge of a shallow stream bubbling over the red-brown rocks in its bed, and Amada's tongue had babbled as merrily as the stream, to the accompaniment of the soft swishing sound of the falling cane, under the strokes of her cousin's machete.

Plácido lifted his head from the bundle he had just tied together with Amada's help and looked into her face, as she announced her determination to accompany him to La Reseda.

"The rough leaves have cut your hand," he said, as she lifted a bleeding finger to her lips. "Stand aside, Amadita, and let me do the rest. How do you suppose I managed

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

without your help before I brought you from Havana?"

"Badly enough!" was the laughing reply. "You have said so, more than once. But what do I care for a drop of blood? Would your precious Violeta scream at a scratch?"

"You cried out when the blood started from the pinprick, Amadita, when the Señora's violets —"

"Ah, but that was different," the little maid protested, still sucking the wounded thumb. "You cannot understand because you are a man who never had flowers given you by a lovely lady who is your enemy. Never mind, I shall go with you now to La Reseda because I am tired of being naughty, and I do wish to see Claudio and his mother."

"And Violeta?"

Amada shrugged her shoulders.

"I love you better than I do Violeta, Amada mia," her cousin added amicably. "And you are not going to be naughty any more, you know. Certainly, I will take you with me to-morrow."

Perhaps the city cousin was not so much impressed with the wonder of the avenue

PEACE

of orange trees leading to the plantation residence of the Nuñez family, nor with the stateliness of the columned portico surrounding the tree-embowered house, as Plácido had hoped she would be, yet Amada's chattering tongue had grown silent some time before they turned aside from the sweep of the driveway and passed around to the side of the house. Her cheeks were even a little paled in color, and she stood close at Plácido's side, as he stopped on the sward outside the low rail of the side verandah, and removed his hat from his head, as he smiled up into the friendly face of a lady leaning toward them.

"You have brought the little cousin, at last!" spoke a clear sweet voice, which was so like that of her own Señora that Amada's heart bounded with joy, notwithstanding her recent treason with the violets. "Ah! what a love of a child!" the Señora murmured. "What stars of eyes, what cheeks like ripe pomegranates, and teeth like pearls! Come, children, and see whom our friend Plácido has brought with him to-day!"

At her summons two charming white-clad children bounded from the open window

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

behind the verandah and scrambled breathless and laughing over the low railing and down upon the grass beside the visitors.

"Is it Amada?" the girl asked quickly, without a trace of shyness, although she was smaller than Amada, and even infantile to look upon, with her fair floating hair, and eyes of pale blue-gray.

The boy had caught Plácido's hand in his, and was holding it pressed against his round cheek, gazing meanwhile at the little stranger with a pleased look in his bright eyes.

"Yes, it is Amada," replied the mother, "and now take her away and show her all your pets, children. She loves the little animals just as you do, and perhaps she will teach you how to make the new paroquet say 'Good morning, dear.' How happy they are, Plácido!" she added as the trio ran off together to a row of outhouses in the yard, where the children kept their pets of many kinds. "You have done me a service in bringing a new plaything to my little ones, who are often cross and willful in this great lonesome place. The potting of the new plants? Ah, yes, go to Teodor. If he is not asleep, he will be ready!"

CHAPTER VI

By sports like these are all their cares beguiled :
The sports of children satisfy the child.

GOLDSMITH.

DURING that first visit to La Reseda, any jealousy of the fair Violeta was replaced in Amada's ardent little soul by a passionate admiration for anything so white and soft and beautiful as the Spanish child appeared to her. Even the pet puppies, the tame white mice, and the fascinating paroquet did not receive the attention due them, during that too brief hour, with the gold threads of Violeta's hair, and the fair roundness of her bare arms, and the blue-gray light of her eyes to rival their more commonplace charms.

It was not until some time after that halcyon September day, that Amada learned that soft-fingered fairies in white and gold could ever touch otherwise than tenderly, and that light-

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

ning flashes from blue-gray eyes could wither with even more scorn than the burning gleam of the darkest orb in Cuba.

Both Spanish children were like their mother, in the pale coloring of her Basque ancestors of Northern Spain, but only Claudio had inherited her gentle spirit. In their games it was Violeta who incited the pets to battle, Claudio whose gentle but firm little hands separated the combatants, and Claudio whose tears fell hopelessly over the wreckage of a fleet of toy boats in a bathtub tempest caused by Violeta's own ruthless hands. The domineering spirit of the father was repeated in the small daughter, and there abode, to Claudio's cost and often to more than his. But for a long time the three children were most happy in their rare seasons of companionship. It was always the Cuban girl who came to the Spanish children, as even the Señora would have hesitated about allowing her cherished ones to visit the hut in the fields belonging to the Nuñez estate.

When Violeta had once demanded of her father permission to ride over to Plácido's bit of farm, and see the new brood of fluffy chickens ardently described by Amada, she

PEACE

had been so violently refused that she had not ventured to repeat her demand, even in the form of humble entreaty.

"If thy mother will allow the dirty brat to come to the house in disregard of my opinion, thou needst ask nothing further, Violeta," the Señor Nuñez had said, on that occasion. "Not dirty, eh? Pretty? Well, tastes differ, but not one step shalt thou or Claudio set in the hovel of the rebel!"

"'Rebel!' Poor faithful Plácido!" the wife had murmured, with her lips laid close against Claudio's light curls. "Such a lover of children, so kind a son, so faithful a servant, a rebel! Would that there were more such 'rebels' in Cuba!"

But the black-browed Señor Nuñez heard nothing of this, and if his little son heard, he already knew better than to divulge secrets whispered into his curls by those dear lips.

Yet the friendship prospered, and the two high-spirited girls never actually came to open warfare if sometimes on the brink. It will always, as of old, take two to make a quarrel, and the blue eyes of Claudio and the upraised, pleading hands told upon Amada's soft heart as it could not upon Violeta's, so

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

sharp words had never yet ended in blows, nor misunderstandings in open rupture.

One balmy winter's day, the children were at play in a shaded angle of the cactus hedge, at the back of the house. The rainy season was at an end now, and the great engines at the sugar house were kept at work, night and day, grinding the cane. Hundreds of negroes, Chinamen, and Cubans, were employed in the ripening cane fields, felling the golden and red stalks with their long, keen-edged machetes, while down the *guarda-rayas*¹ rumbled the ox-carts on solid wooden wheels, laden with the precious freight for the crushing mill.

The sapphire sky hung speckless above the acres of waving green, the warm, dry air was laden with the fragrance of fruit and flowers, and a faint wind from the south bore on its wings fragments of the musical chanting of the negroes, moving leisurely up and down the green walls of cane.

The Spanish children were dressed as usual in the whitest of linen, and wore slippers of kid and short-legged white socks on their feet. Their heads were protected from the sun by broad, flat hats of palm leaf, tied on by blue

¹ *Guarda-rayas*, aisles through the cane.

PEACE

ribbons fastened under their chins. Amada's black head, innocent of covering, was as smooth as the natural waviness of her hair permitted, having been brushed and braided by Plácido himself, that day, before she tripped off to La Reseda. Now that the rains were over, Salomé was a little better of her rheumatism, and it had been possible, for once, to spare Amada for a whole day of holiday-making with Violeta and Claudio. The Señora and the children were to leave La Reseda on the following day, for their yearly visit to the United States, and deeply had Amada grieved over the separation to come.

As they sat together now, under the stems of the plantain growth roofing the angle of the cactus hedge, the broad dark leaves above threw an impartial shade over fresh white skirts and faded blue, over bare, black head and sunny curls. The children were intent upon a pair of little cages fashioned of reeds by Plácido's clever fingers. Each girl had a cage upon her lap, and busied herself with weaving in and out of its interstices long fibers of grass handed them by Claudio.

"It was very stupid of Plácido to put the

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

reeds so far apart!" Violeta exclaimed, at length, tossing the cage from her and throwing herself back against the stem of the tree. "So much trouble he has given us! You must finish my cage, Amada, I am sick of it! But as it is, not one *cucullo*¹ will stay inside!"

"I must finish Claudio's first," Amada returned with spirit. "Why do you not do your own? There is plenty of time, and plenty of grass, too."

"Oh, I'm not a Cuban! I can do as I please!" Violeta retorted saucily.

Amada's eyes flashed, as Violeta had expected they would, and the naughty child peered laughingly from under her hat brim into the crimsoned face of the other girl.

It was such sport to make Amada flush red, and strike electric sparks with her eyes, that Violeta was often guilty of provocation. But this time the color faded from the Cuban girl's brow and bare neck, and the long fringe of the eyelids hid the burning eyes, without one bitter word having escaped the tightly folded lips. It was their last day together, Amada had recollected in time to swallow a brave retort, and besides, Claudio was just

¹ *Cucullo*, fire-beetle, of brilliant coloring.

PEACE

passing over to her a handful of the green strips she needed.

"My *cucullos* will never get out of my cage, will they, Amadita?" the little boy said, slipping along on the turf to lay a cool round cheek against Amada's shoulder, in his affectionate way. "I shall carry them to New York, to the Señor Lopez —"

"*María santísima!* they will all be dead by that time, silly boy," Violeta cried, reaching again for her cage, however, and snatching the strips from Amada's lap. "Plácido has promised to bring fifty *cucullos* to us when he comes to fetch you, to-night, Amada, and every one will be dead before we get off the steamer at New York. What do you think of that?"

"I think you talk as if you were glad they would be dead," was the candid reply.

"It does not hurt them to be dead, goose, but I am not really glad, because then they do not shine any more, no matter how much sugar cane we give them to eat, greedy things!"

"I saw a necklace once that shone like a string of *cucullos* flying on a dark night," Amada said slowly, laying down the little

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

cage, and gazing off along the cactus hedge, with a far-away look in her dark eyes.

"Then it must have been an emerald necklace like mamá's; it *is* emerald, isn't it, Violeta?" Claudio asked, deferring to his sister's more accurate jewel lore.

"Perhaps they were emeralds," Amada went on, still dreamily. "I never saw them but once. I carried my mamá's sewing to Doña Isabel one morning. It was very early, and the sun was just come up out of the sea."

"Go on, Amadita. It is like a story," Violeta urged, as the girl paused, with a smile upon her parted lips, and still gazing at nothing.

"Doña Isabel was in the arbor —"

"And Cristóbal, was he there, Amada, in the yellow dress? And did he make horrid faces at you?" Claudio asked with interest. "Tell some more about him."

"No! tell about the emerald necklace," Violeta insisted. "Did the fat old lady in the chair wear it around her neck?"

"No, it would take a line of *cucullos* such as Plácido and I saw flying across the road the other night, to reach around her fat neck," Amada replied disdainfully.



"He was a Spanish officer." Page 95

PEACE

"I had finished with Doña Isabel and was going away, when I saw the cream-colored ponies come trotting up the avenue, so I hid under the jessamine trellis at the corner of the verandah, and waited till the carriage stopped in front of the door. Then my Señora got out of the carriage and stood a minute on the verandah step, so close to me that I could have pulled her dress."

"What did she stop for? Did she see you, Amada?" asked Claudio.

"How could she see Amada hidden behind the jessamine trellis, Claudio? You do ask such silly questions, and interrupt all the time, and don't you know Amada's Señora is a Spanish lady? She wouldn't be stopping to speak to little Cuban girls like Amada."

"My mamá would," Claudio insisted sturdily.

"There was a Señor with her, and he was standing on the lower step of the verandah," Amada went on with only a shrug of her shoulders in reply to this interruption, "and she was looking down into his face. He was a Spanish officer." The last words were uttered with evident reluctance.

[LITTLE CUBA LIBRE]

Claudio's eyes glistened, but as the wise little boy had learned by this time that Amada was not fond of Spanish army officers, he did not say a word.

"My mamá says they must have been at a ball all night, and the Señora was just coming home," the story-teller continued, "because she was dressed —"

"Oh, how was she dressed, Amada? I like to hear about ladies at balls, and the señors, their lovers. Some day, I also —"

"I do not know, Violeta, except that she was all white and green and shining. Her cape fell on the verandah floor, when she leaned down to say something to the Señor, and her neck was bare, and then I saw the necklace. The sun shone on the green and the gold of it, and then the light that flashed in my eyes was like the light of the *cucullos* at night, when there is no moon."

"I know it was not so handsome a necklace as my mamá's," said Violeta with quiet conviction. "She keeps it with her rings and brooches in the box of carved wood which has a lock and key, so I cannot get them. One night I found the box open, and put on all the rings and stuck the gold pins in my hair

PEACE

and fastened the brooches on my frock, and went down into the *sala* where there were many ladies and gentlemen. Mamá wore the necklace that night herself."

"And papá said that you were a —," began Claudio breathlessly.

"Hush, Claudio, I am telling this story. The Señor Jones was there, and he took me on his knee, and asked me if I had bells on my toes too, under my slippers!"

"What did he mean by bells on your toes, Violeta?" Amada asked gravely.

"Oh, that's only a rhyme the 'papas and mamas' in New York say to their children. But you do not understand English, Amada."

"Say it," the other briefly adjured her, and Violeta jabbered off the famous nursery rhyme in her rendering of the English, while Amada listened in undisguised admiration.

'Ride a cockahorse—a
To Banbury cross—a
To see an old woman
Ride on a white horse—a,
With rings on her fingers,
And bells on her toes—a
She makes pretty music
Wherever she goes—a.'

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

"When the Señor Jones asked me that, I kicked off my slipper to let him see if there were any bells, — just like that!" and Violeta kicked one small foot so vigorously that her slipper shot up into the air, and falling, landed with a sharp tap of the heel on Amada's up-turned forehead. Violeta laughed merrily until she saw the red mark left by the slipper on her playmate's brow, then she sobered a little.

"I did not mean to hit you," she said, "it was the slipper's fault, not mine. Put it on for me, Amada, I am so tired with working on your cousin's old cages."

Amada obediently restored the slipper to the white-socked foot, and then as the cages were at last finished, and in readiness for the beautiful fire-beetles which were to share the journey of the next day, the children rolled over upon the grass and continued their chattering.

"Isn't my mamá more beautiful than your Señora, Amada?" Violeta asked tauntingly, while Claudio looked serious and, child that he was, wished his sister would not ask such questions. "And is not my papá richer than your Señora's husband?"

PEACE

"She has no husband now; he is dead," was the soft-voiced reply. "He died of the fever one day, and Doña Isabel takes care of her now."

"Havana is a horrid, bad-smelling place, and everybody dies of fever there," Violeta went on. "My papá will not let us stay there, unless he is with us."

"He can not keep off the fever," said Claudio quickly. "Only the Holy Virgin can do that, mamá says."

"Then why does she not do it all the time? I suppose papá cannot trust her, for he always sends us to New York instead of letting us stay in Havana when he has to stay at the *ingenio*. Now that you are here to play with us, Amada, I do not care so much to go to New York. It is very ugly and cold there!"

Amada flushed prettily at Violeta's graciousness, but did not reply.

"Are there Cubans in New York," she asked presently, after all three had kept silence while watching a large fuzzy moth, with untried wings, attempt in vain the ascent of the plantain tree-stem.

"There! I'll help you, poor thing!" said Claudio, catching the moth's fluttering wings

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

between a gentle thumb and forefinger, and rising to place it as high as he could reach upon the tip of a cactus leaf.

For an instant the moth poised itself safely, and then clumsily fluttered to the ground, too close, alas! to Violeta's slipped foot. In an instant life was extinguished in the soft velvety thing, and the quivering creamy wings were still.

With one look at the pretty crumpled creature on the grass, which had taken so light a touch of Violeta's slipper to crush it, Claudio scrambled to his feet and rushed away toward the house with a sob in his throat, and the girls were left alone.

"What a baby, and a boy, too!" Violeta sniffed, turning her own back, however, upon her victim, and rolling nearer to Amada, who sat upright, gazing after the boy. "Now, let's talk about New York," she added. "There are many Cubans there, rich Cubans —"

"I would kill a rat, or a centipede, or a scorpion, or a poisonous snake," the Cuban girl said slowly, her eyes returning to the dead moth on the grass, "or a wicked, cruel Spaniard!" she might have added, but Violeta's

PEACE

youthful bravado was teaching her self-control. Besides, she was fond of Violeta, though not half so much so as of Claudio.

"What is one old moth?" muttered Violeta. "It was too old to fly, anyway. Perhaps it had rheumatism like your uncle has. Is it rheumatism he has in his legs?"

"It was too young to fly," cried Amada indignantly. "I should think going to New York would teach you something about things. By and by that moth would have been flying about the madreselva vine and drinking honey out of the little white and yellow vases. I've seen them in the garden of my —" She stopped abruptly, and Violeta laughed.

"Perhaps I shall see your 'my Señora' next week in Havana," the Spanish girl said. "My mamá says she is acquainted with her, and perhaps we shall go to her villa, if we stop in Havana. Then I shall know her better than you do. When I shall say to her, 'Do you remember a poor little Cuban girl who used to bring the servants' shirts which her mother had made, to Doña Isabel?' she will open her eyes very wide and shake her head, and then I shall know that she has quite forgotten you."

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

"I do not care!" snapped Amada with one of her fiery glances.

"Also I shall ask Cristóbal Colon if he remembers you —"

"He will not understand you, for he is as deaf as the moth you killed just now!"

The arrival upon the scene of old Clara, the children's nurse, here turned the course of events, and instead of running off into the hot sun of the road, and hastening homeward with her burden of childish insults, as she had been tempted to do during the past five minutes, Amada meekly followed the old negress and her charge to breakfast in an arbor behind the house. There, the fresh, white bread, the baked bananas, the ripe oranges, and the pretty cups of chocolate served the children quite dissipated the clouds caused by the idle taunts and childish retorts in the shadow of the cactus hedge, and old Clara served Amada with the same care with which she attended upon the wants of the children of the house. Such had been the command of the Señora Nuñez, and the amiable old woman was faithful in her obedience.

As Amada swung upon her cousin's hand, skipping homeward at sunset, she had many

PEACE

things to tell him of her long day at the big house.

"Did you see the Señor, Amada?" Plácido asked once, in the midst of the story of the grand breakfast in the arbor.

"Not once. He was off at his other *ingenio*, Violeta said. She also said that perhaps I should not have been allowed to eat at the little table with them, if her papá had been at home. Violeta says many disagreeable things, Plácido *mio*."

"Yet you are fond of her and of Claudio?"

"Ah, yes! But, cousin," she added in an undertone after a brief silence, "sometimes I think it must be a fine thing to be a Spaniard!"

"Amada! *you* say such things?"

The girl hung her head and plodded on in the dust, in silence.

Overhead, the stars were already flashing in the sky, although but a short time had elapsed since the sun had sunk in a haze of saffron and rose. Darkness was settling over the fields, and from the bushes along the way myriads of insect sounds filled the evening air. Here and there already a gleam of emerald fire sparkled above the shrubbery, and the wind sighed contentedly among the

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

ponderous leaves of the royal palms bordering the road in sparse groups of twos and threes.

"I like white frocks and hats with ribbons upon them," the girl went on at last, a little bravado in her tone. "And it would be nice to travel on a ship to New York."

"White frocks and hats do not make Spaniards of any one, little cousin. I will buy you a hat, and a white frock also, if the plantains sell well to-morrow. And Cubans as well as Spaniards may go to New York, Amada. It is only money that is needed. Would you really be a Spaniard, little one?"

"Plácido, no! Not for all the world! And you shall not buy me a hat or anything else. I shall have much time to learn to sew now that the Señora is going to take Violeta and Claudio away, and I shall finish your new trousers. You are good to me, Plácido, and you love me better than Violeta does!"

Plácido pressed the brown hand lying warmly in his, and the rest of the way was taken almost in silence.

Outside the half-closed door opening directly into the thatched hut, the man held Amada back for an instant, yet seemed to find it hard to say what he had detained her to hear.

PEACE

"What is it, Plácido?" the girl whispered. "I hear my uncle groaning. Is he worse?"

"Listen, dear," her cousin said, at length. "This is no time for brave Cuban men and women to be wishing themselves Spaniards. Yes, I know you did not mean what you said. But the time is coming, Amada, and coming fast, when Cuban and Spanish children will no longer play together, even when fathers are out of sight. I heard strange news last night, while in the wood, collecting the *cucullos* for Violeta. I did not tell you because you were to be with them to-day, and I cannot tell my father and my mother, only to cause them fear."

"Tell me, Plácido. I am large now, and am your sister, is it not so?" Amada raised herself to her full height and looked fondly into her cousin's face. "You have only me, you know!"

And then Plácido whispered into Amada's listening ear words which made her stand more erect and raise her head more proudly upon her shoulders, till in the semi-light she seemed little less in height than the ever-stooping figure of Plácido. Her heart beat fast, and the blood surged to her brain, but the night

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

curtained her flashing eyes and hid the excited quiver of her red lips.

"How long before —?" She faltered once, when Plácido paused in the midst of his breathless sentences.

"Hush! it may be months yet. But they are to be ready —"

"'They?' Why do you not say 'we'?" Amada demanded impatiently. "And what will there be for girls — for women to do?"

"To sit in their homes and pray to the Virgin, at first," was the sober reply. "Afterward, there may be fleeing and hiding and suffering and tears and — death!"

"Sit and pray to the Virgin! *Caramba*, cousin! I am only a little girl, as you often tell me, but you will see. No Spanish soldier shall ever find me sitting and praying at home."

"God forbid!" the man ejaculated, and then, with a gesture of protection, he gently pushed the vehement child before him into the darkened room, where Salomé slept and Juan groaned, and where in a corner hung the canvas hammock-bed of Amada.

And the warm tropical night deepened in shadow under the splendor of its stars. The

PEACE

great fires blazed in the sugar mills over the island, and the bare-chested negroes fed the greedy flames with the crushed stalks of the canes, that some children might wear white frocks and travel by ship to New York, that the señoras might keep their jewel caskets filled with rings and brooches, and that the señors might add thousands of *pesos* to their bank accounts.

Far off, here and there in the island, the royal palms whispered together above thatched roof and homeless head, but if they spoke of secrets confided to their keeping, their language was known neither to lurking spy nor treacherous human friend, and the secrets were as safe as that intrusted that night to the faithful little heart of Amada.



PART SECOND

WAR

**To fight for their country, their children, their hearth
and home.**

SALLUST.

CHAPTER VII

Our country sinks beneath the yoke;
It weeps, it bleeds, and each new day a gash
Is added to her wounds.

SHAKESPEARE.

ALMOST two years passed after that tropical winter's day at La Reseda, which had ended with the whispered conference between Plácido and his little cousin in the starlight outside the door of the adobe hut, and Amada reached her fourteenth year of age. She was now well-grown and vigorous, the wholesome air of the open country having added strength to limb and muscle, as well as warmer color to her cheeks, and brighter luster to her eyes.

The black mark of charcoal on a certain whitewashed wall at La Reseda, registering the Cuban girl's height, stood quite six inches above the next mark below, measuring the height of Violeta, and Violeta, the last time, had even insisted upon standing in her high-

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

heeled slippers, while Amada had worn only her usual hempen sandals upon her feet!

Violeta, indeed, was very small and slight, and there was even fear in her mind that some day Claudio, the gentle brother, would grow to be as tall as herself, so fast were his marks overtaking her own, up the wall!

After the return of the Spanish children from their first visit to New York, succeeding Amada's coming to the country, there had been a revival of the friendship and the visits between peasant hut and plantation mansion. Violeta had been eager to impress the simple country girl with her own added charms of dress and manner, imported from the great city of the north into the troubled island of the south, and she had demanded Amada's presence at La Reseda during the first days after the arrival at home. Yet, after a few weeks, it was plain that an indefinable change had touched their relations with one another, and by degrees intercourse between them languished, though not yet to the point of complete cessation.

When Violeta after a while found that Amada never came to La Reseda except upon peremptory invitation from herself, and when

WAR

she realized that even their indulgent mother no longer offered to endorse her children's wishes for Amada's presence, she one day confided to Claudio her opinion that Plácido and Amada must be considered the most dangerous of rebels, at the very least.

"As if we have not known all the time that they were poor Cubans, and not really fit to associate with us, except that they amused us!" she added, with some scorn tipping her small nose and curling her lip. "As for me, I shall keep sending for Amada whenever I am tired of you and the flowers and the guitar and all the rest. I am not afraid of her setting fire to our house, so long as we are in it!"

And Claudio had thought of nothing to reply to this, being convinced that Violeta would always have her own way, in spite of caution from him, and being, besides, far more attached to his old playmate Amada than his selfish sister could ever be to any one in the world.

Exile from the pillared mansion under the poplar trees could not now mean for Amada what it would have meant one year before. Indeed, it had at last become for her more painful than pleasing to enter the gates of

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

the plantation avenue and anticipate, during its shaded length, an hour or more of Violeta's girlish conversation and of the quiet inspection of Claudio's thoughtful gray eyes. It was easier to slip back and forth along the *guardarayas* through the cane, lifting high, almost impenetrable walls of green on either hand, where there was less chance of encountering any but friendly negroes or brooding Cubans, than in the usual approach to the house. The troubled countenance of the gentle lady of the house was a sight almost as much to be avoided now, in Amada's present state of mind, as that of the black-browed master, and by degrees, Amada was learning to harden her heart against her young friends.

A year elapsed after Violeta and Claudio with their mother had returned from that former visit to the United States and then once again they had sailed thither and returned, it being their custom to spend several months of each year somewhere out of the Island.

Perhaps if the Señor Nuñez had been wiser, he would have listened to the counsels of his friends in the seaport towns of Cuba, and would have refrained from calling his family

WAR

home after this last flitting northward. But he was as fierce in his passionate love for his children as in his contempt for the native dwellers in the Island, and no sooner had the cane-cutting and grinding ended each year, than he had despatched a summons for their return, in Violeta's own peremptory manner, while the city delights of café and bull-fight plaza were calling him, for he chafed at the simpler life of the plantation, without his beautiful children to amuse his hours at home, and his beautiful wife to entertain the numerous friends his luxurious and lavish habits collected around him in Havana.

He had hesitated a little this last time before sending off his summons, although he could not share the apprehensions of many of his compatriots concerning the final outcome of the *Mambis*'¹ uprisings. During the summer, he had paid a hasty visit to Spain, and he had returned in August filled with the view of the mother country concerning the

¹ Mambi: "A term implying savage or uncouth origin, equivalent to Digger Indian, bestowed on the insurgents by the Spanish in a former war. The word, however, pleased the rebels' sense of humor and they now, jokingly, if not seriously, apply it to themselves as a nickname."

"Marching with Gómez", by Grover Flint.

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

final result of the revolution, and more hopeful than any Spanish general in Cuba had come to be. The news of rebel successes had slightly dampened his enthusiasm, nevertheless a letter had gone swiftly on its way from Havana to Key West, from Key West to New York and, obedient to its summons, the Señora Nuñez had returned with her girl and boy to Cuba.

Twice only had Amada seen her friends since this last return. Once she had responded to Violeta's summons, and had passed an hour of mingled pain and pleasure in the girl's own luxurious room, with its large windows, its lofty frescoed walls, and its sumptuous furnishings. She had not seen Claudio on this occasion, as he had been riding over the estate with his father, the gray pony trotting modestly beside the champion bay horse, up and down the *guarda-rayas* of the cane fields.

The other time, a few days later, Amada had been cutting grass by the road at noon-tide. Heavily rolling wheels had passed so close to her that her scant skirts had fluttered about her bare ankles as they sped by, and she had scarcely time to recognize Violeta and her parents in the open carriage as it swiftly

WAR

whirled onward toward Limonar. A vision of bright silk parasols and of streaming ribbons caught her eye and was forgotten, as a pony cart swiftly following the carriage paused suddenly a few feet beyond the spot where she stood. The pony had been so suddenly brought to a stand that the occupants of the vehicle — a young man in the uniform of a Spanish officer, and a slight, fair-haired boy — had reeled in their seats.

“Hello, Amadita!” came in boyish salutation from Claudio, whose arresting hand still lay upon the gloved ones of the officer holding the reins. “Don’t you know me, then? But what a great girl you’ve grown! I wish I could stop and help you cut the grass, instead of hurrying to catch the train for Matanzas. There’s to be a horrid bull fight there this afternoon, and papá will have me go, though it makes me sick to see the horses suffer. I have not forgotten you, Amada, all this time. Good-by, dear!” and the horses were off apace, and Amada was left staring and blinking by the roadside. She knew that, before very long, the family would go to the city home for the gay autumn and winter season.

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

Meanwhile, for eighteen long months, since the fateful twenty-fifth day of February, 1895, the lovely island of Cuba, Pearl of the Antilles, had agonized from east to west in the pains of war. The first hushed whisperings of the royal palms, at night, echoes caught from fiercer whisperings in their shadows underneath, had been carried by human lips, by secret sign, by a flash of the eye, from Baracoa and Guantánamo in the far east, to Pinar del Rio in the west.

For long and weary months men had fought from ambush, from flimsy fort, from bedroom window, from plummy tree-top, at the point of the bayonet, under the edge of the machete; had died of wounds under the thatched roofs of forest huts, had starved and sickened in desolated villages and rude, open-air camping grounds. 71

Women had wept and prayed till eyes refused tears, and lips rebelled at prayer; had followed loved ones to lurking-places in the hills; had died of exhaustion and starvation and grief, with their babies in their arms; had urged weary and discouraged men to their task of liberating Cuba from "the tyrant",— of restoring Cuba to their youthful sovereign

WAR

across the sea. Man and woman, Cuban and Spaniard, had suffered together, yet none need await the summary of History's pages to know which suffered the deeper pangs, the graver injury.

Here and there, over the Island, plantations had been burned by the hands of insurgent and Spaniard. Stately mansion and peasant hut had been destroyed wherever it suited the plans and passions of either army to apply the torch, that the other might lack for provisions and shelter.

Skeletons of noble houses and blackened heaps of brush, in the midst of charred fields and scorched forests, told the tale of war, and still Cuban wives urged their men to stand against Spain, still Cuban maidens stitched their bits of flannel and embroidery silk into "*detentes*"¹ for their brothers and lovers to wear over their hearts in battle, and still Cuban mothers lifted their souls to God, and the "Queen of Heaven", while the hearts of titled lady and peasant woman in Spain, bled

¹ *Detente*: Simple insurgent emblem, consisting of a heart, a cross, a scroll of leaves and the motto: "*Detente! El corazon de Jesus está conmigo.*" (Be of good cheer! The heart of Jesus is with me), embroidered in colors on a bit of flannel.

"Marching with Gómez", by Grover Flint.

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

with the anguish of sending husband and son across the sea to die.

Gómez, the veteran soldier of San Domingo, had long ago landed in the southeast and accomplished his zigzag march across Spanish trocha and mountain ridge from one end of the Island to the other; Antonio Maceo had roused adoring enthusiasm in the west, with his dashing band of cavalry, and had communicated sympathy with the rebellion and belief in it, to the most timid Cuban heart in the island.

The Spanish captain-general, Campos, had been recalled to Spain, and Valeriano Weyler had come to take his place to repair the "errors" of his predecessor and to speedily reduce Spain's rebellious subjects to submission. He had come, but had found Cuba only less submissive, as the months rolled on, and, in his luxurious palace in Havana, Weyler must have sometimes wondered over the failure of his sternest measures to bring an outraged people to terms.

The years had brought changes to the home of Plácido Ruiz, although his orchard trees were still suffered to bear fruit in their season, and the patch of ground which yielded

WAR

such pumpkins and sweet potatoes as were rarely matched in Limonar still responded generously to his spade and plantings. It had not been possible to replace the donkey, which had lain down and died of old age, one day, on the road to town, so Plácido's own back had had to bend to the burden of the vegetable and fruit baskets in the journeys back and forth to the market place in Limonar. Thus, the tall stooping shoulders of the man had acquired an added droop, which Salomé bemoaned in her heart. How hard poor Plácido had had to work since Juan had been injured in the bull-plaza! The boy had been taller and straighter than most Cuban lads in his first youth, while now one might easily fancy him thirty-five instead of twenty-five years of age.

But the loss of the donkey was as nothing to Plácido in comparison with the greater loss that had befallen him some months later in the death of his father. It is true that the old man's sufferings were ended now, but he had longed to live to see Cuba free. Never once had he despaired of the successful outcome of the present struggle, and Amada had been his pride and joy, with her fierce indignation.

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

tions and fiery exultations over the rumors of fightings now and then brought to the little fruit farm. But Juan was gone now, buried in the Campo Santo of Limonar, and still Cuba was not free.

In all this time, Amada had not once returned to Havana, nor seen the faces of her family there. One or two letters had passed between Plácido and Pablo in the two years since the father had parted from his daughter at the street corner, and had watched her patter off at her cousin's side toward the railroad station.

Little account was taken of the pending struggle, in the capital city, where the Spanish element was strong, and working men were slow to believe that their own cause could prosper or avail in the face of disciplined and well-armed troops of "the enemy."

One brilliant October day, in the second year of the war for independence, Plácido, assisted by Amada, was gathering guavas from a tree in the little orchard surrounding the thatched cottage, and a flat, round basket upon the ground was nearly filled with the yellow fruit, all creamy softness within. A

WAR

sky of the brightest blue arched overhead, and the whole landscape was bathed in hot sunshine.

At the door of the hut, but just inside, so that the sun should not strike upon her head, sat Salomé, dozing upon a low stool. Her knotted hands lay helpless upon her knees, and her gray head was bowed upon her breast. Since the death of Juan, the old woman had fallen into the habit of sleeping much in the day, and of lying awake during the hours of darkness, and of late her eyes had learned to turn often toward the unshuttered opening in the wall of the sleeping room for a glimpse of reddened sky or of any sign in the neighborhood of lurking friend or foe. But she was happy now, in her light slumber, and in the consciousness, even through the mists of sleep, of the nearness of the two most precious to her heart.

A negro servant from La Reseda had interrupted the fruit gathering for a few moments, for he had brought a message from Violeta, requesting a visit from Amada that very afternoon. Although Salvador had added to the request the news that the Señor Nuñez was about to hurry his family and himself away to

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

safer quarters in the city, and that this would be Amada's last visit to La Reseda, perhaps forever, who could tell? it had not been hard to frame an excuse for not obeying the summons, and the negro had returned to his young mistress with the first actual refusal that had ever met the Señorita Violeta's demand for Amada's attendance upon her.

"It had to be, you know, Plácido," Amada said, a little tremulously, after having despatched her excuse to La Reseda by Salvador. "It has been a month since I was last there, and you saw how Salvador looked to-day when he gave Violeta's message to me. Did he not shake his head when I asked you to help me with an answer?"

"You have sharp eyes, Amada!" was Plácido's simple reply.

"You have been right and I wrong, cousin," Amada continued. "Long ago I was the last to agree to visit the Spaniards, and I have been the last to agree to giving them up."

"You are not 'giving them up,' Amadita, by holding off from intimacy for a while. The Señora loves you just as well as ever —"

"I can never be as you are, Plácido!" the girl cried impatiently. "I must be either on

WAR

one side or the other. So long as you and aunt are *pacíficos*,¹ I also am counted the same, but in my heart, you know it is not true. *Ay de mí!* what a tempest is inside of me sometimes, Plácido *mio*, at the thought that I am only a girl, bound to stay at home and grind corn, while our men are leaving their homes, and living in the woods, half starving perhaps, but fighting to help set Cuba free!"

"And firing homesteads and canefields, plundering their own villages, and frightening women and babes to death!" Plácido added softly, lifting his dark eyes to Amada, whose brows were bent upon him.

"Your eyes are like those of the great white ox they call General Campos, at La Reseda," Amada said, laughing, but her own fell before her cousin's steady gaze. "It is not only we who burn homes and frighten babies," she muttered, stooping to pick a guava from the ground and place it gently in the basket.

"Ah, no! and there may come a time when patience will be no longer a virtue for the most peace-loving man in the island," was the unexpectedly hearty response from the

¹ Noncombatants.

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

man's bearded lips. "Amada," Plácido went on, as he watched her graceful arms reach toward the boughs above her head, "what would my mother do, if I should join Maceo? What would you do, Amadita?"

"What else but stay at home here to take care of my aunt and the pigs? I am not a man to fight. But I can handle a machete, cousin! It is true a Spaniard's neck is a little more stout than the stalks of cane in the swamp, but your machete is sharp, and my arm is strong! See, how large and strong it is, Plácido *mió!*" And the girl pushed up her sleeve, and stretched out her stout, young arm toward Plácido.

"How fierce you are always, Amada! You, then, wish to take life?"

"No! cousin, but if I were but a man, and might find Gómez —"

"Little star of our life, I am glad thou art not a man, but only a dear little cousin!" Plácido said calmly, but with a hasty look around at the mention of the General's name uttered boldly by Amada. His glance behind brought an added color to the girl's cheek, and silence fell between them as they continued their fruit gathering.

CHAPTER VIII

Talk not of comfort; 'tis for lighter ills.

ADDISON.

A FORTNIGHT later, as Plácido was returning home from Limonar at dusk, he was joined by another peasant, one of the laborers at the sugar mill of the Señor Nuñez, also homeward bound to his own wretched hovel, built of palm leaves and bark.

The two men shuffled along through the red dust of the road for some time without speaking, after their first salutations. The freshness of the night touched their sun-burned cheeks and perspiring brows, and the air of the fields came to their nostrils laden with the odors of rank vegetation and night-blooming plants. Away off in the direction of Matanzas there was a sullen glow in the sky, whose meaning both men knew only too well.

"Another *candela* !¹" muttered the laborer,

¹ Light, bonfire.

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

stopping and staring northward at the crimson flare. "Gómez or Weyler,¹ it is all the same for us. When everything in Cuba has been killed and burned the war will end, for there will be nothing left to fight about."

"The war will not end so," Plácido returned, not staying his steps.

"How then?" asked the other curiously, as he rejoined Plácido. "Will you at last join our men and 'rout the Spaniards out of the country in a single fight'? Ha! it is easy for us who have to stay at home to talk, —" he added in whispering accents, which were interrupted by Plácido's earnest voice.

"You do not 'have to stay at home,' *amigo mio*. Neither parents, wife nor child have you, and yet you —"

"Yet I have no more relish than you for ten bullets in my back, at one volley," interrupted the laborer in his turn, and with a mocking note in his voice.

"I was not in favor of the war at first, I acknowledge," Plácido went on with some heat; "I have other things to think of than shooting men from ambush, and driving women out of their homes, so long as nothing is to be

¹ That is: Cuban or Spaniard.

WAR

gained. But things look different now, especially since what we heard in town to-day. Weyler must be losing hope, or he would never have ordered what the rumors report. My heart is heavy to-night, Santiago, and who knows what is to be done?"

"You will join the army now, Plácido?"

"And leave my mother and my little cousin to be driven like cattle into one of their *corrals*?"

"Leave your — your mother and your little cousin to me," suggested Santiago with an unpleasant smile. "I, too, think the little one is worth caring for, although she treats me as she would treat no filthy dog of the city. Go you into the swamp and find Maceo. He will give you a warm welcome, and the Spaniards, perhaps, a warmer one still, when you fall into their hands!"

Plácido made no answer to this impudent speech, but walked on thoughtfully, as if the fellow were beneath notice, in the whirl of his more serious thoughts.

"Well, *adios, amigo*," Santiago called out finally, as Plácido mechanically turned to leave the road by a nearer footpath leading to his clump of fruit trees, and without a word of

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

leave-taking for his companion. "Let me know when you are ready to go, and I will come over and take your peaceful place." Plácido received this remark with a start, and a complete recognition of the man's impertinence. He stepped back into the road and threw off his basket from his shoulders, then fumbled at his belt. He spoke not a word, yet in his eyes burned a fire of surprise and wrath.

Santiago dropped his swaggering air at sight of Plácido's return to the road. It was easy to fire taunts at the back of one in retreat, — not so easy for one of his cowardly make to face the anger of one brought to bay.

"*Caramba!* man, but must you be angry at a friendly jest?" he called, backing further along the road and staring furtively at Plácido in the dusk. "This is no time for friends to quarrel. Go home to your mother and the girl. If no worse foe than I offer to relieve you of their care, you may sleep well at night, and whistle a merry tune all day."

With a shrug of his broad stooping shoulders, Plácido reached for his basket, and muttering a good night after the dark figure which was already slouching away, he stepped back into the narrow footway. He had scarcely taken

WAR

three steps when a slim figure rose up out of the tall grass waving in the night wind at one side of the path.

"Amadita!" called the man in half-affright. He laid his arm on the warm, bare shoulder of his cousin, and gazed anxiously into her full dark eyes, which even in the starlight gleamed back into his.

"Why did you let him go, Plácido?" Amada asked vehemently; "I should have stuck my knife into him. I do not know what he was saying to you, for I was just coming along the path, but he made you angry, and I saw you stop in the road. I do not like Santiago Gámez, and I believe he is a spy!"

"Santiago is too cowardly even to be a spy, Amadita," Plácido returned, his anger evaporating at sight of his pet. "Let him go; there is a more important matter now to be considered than the foolish words of a coward." But he seemed to find it hard to explain at once what this might be, as he followed Amada's springing steps along the narrow path. She was silent also, wondering what could have been the words which had roused her cousin to the violent gestures she thought she had witnessed in the faint light.

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

But she was still too much of a child to wonder long on any mysterious subject, and was presently teasing Plácido for news of the town.

War had so long been present in the island that unless there were some imminent peril close at hand, or fresh news from the roving bands of patriots in swamp or mountain, the country people in remote districts were wont to go their way and dig and delve with what sense of security were possible. There were still left here and there in the different provinces plantations of cane which sprang anew from the roots year after year, and was ground in the great mills as yet untouched by the torch of the destroyer of either party.

Also there were simple homes, where the old and very young dwelt in comparative security, with their patches of potatoes or onions planted about the doors, or their bunch of plantain growth supplying a scanty subsistence. The able-bodied men of most of such families had long ago joined the patriot bands, and some had already given of their life's blood, and even life itself to the cause. In some homes the men still lingered, loath to abandon the helpless ones to more danger

WAR

than even they themselves might encounter in the bush and swamp lands. Among these last was Plácido Ruiz. Had there been no Salomé or Amada to be considered, he would ere now have abandoned the fruit trees to the birds and slow ruin, and joined the fierce old leader, Gómez, wherever he might find him.

Neither Helena's taunts nor Amada's fierce indignation were needed now to rouse in his heart the slumbering fires of despair over the oppression of his country, but he was also patient and loving, and as yet it had not seemed possible to give up the peaceful life which had been his so long, and risk the security of those dearer to him than even Cuba itself.

If Salomé and Amada could be conveyed in safety to Havana and Pablo — but where was there any safety along the railroads, which were in Spanish hands, and where was the money, besides? Since no more fruit was sold at the railroad stations between Limonar and Matanzas, less was bought of him in the market of Limonar, and of late a much smaller basket had been needed for the transport of his guavas and limes.

"Amada, there is news to-day that must

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

alarm even your stout heart," he said at last, as the footpath led them out of the grass-grown field directly to the door of their house.

They sat down together on the palm log, as was their custom at evening, when the day was done and the bright stars flashed above them in the sky. Salomé crouched on her stool inside the doorway. Her black eyes were bright and wakeful, and peered out into the night at the sound of her son's voice.

"Thy news must indeed be terrible if thou thinkest to frighten Amadita," the old woman said sharply, shaking her gray head from side to side. "She was wishing to-day that the Spanish troops would come along the road that she might see for herself 'something of their wonderful bravery which is keeping Cuba a slave!' As for me, I pray the Holy Virgin that I may never again see the colors of their flag!"

Amada paid no attention to her aunt's words, but laid her brown hand on her cousin's arm in her usual eager fashion.

"Tell me," she urged. "I am no coward, as I should think you might know by this time."

But even her impetuous heart seemed to

WAR

stop its beating for a moment as Plácido in low tones began his story. Salomé, leaning her gray head toward them, heard every word he uttered, but she kept still and held her peace, as is the way of women who have already lived through one war, and have in vain prayed that their eyes and ears may be closed forever before another shall devastate their country and their hearts.

"You say that General Weyler has ordered all *pacíficos* away from their homes in the country to the forts and cities? And why, Plácido?" Amada demanded, with her hand laid upon her heart now.

"That they may be safe from the plundering and the burning going on everywhere, say some. Others say that he knows all the country people are with the patriots at heart, and that by destroying our homes and gardens, he will be cutting off supplies from them, and so deplete their forces."

"But do they *have* to go — those poor women and children?"

"At the point of the sword, Amada. They are being driven along the roads outside of Cárdenas and Matanzas, and every place where there are Spanish forts and barracks."

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

"We shall not have to go, Plácido!" the girl said proudly. "No one will ever drive us from here. Only say that, Plácido, and then I shall go to bed in peace. I have been washing the clothes to-day, and my arms are tired." She stretched them wearily above her head, but watched her cousin's dim face narrowly.

"Go to bed, Amadita," was his quiet reply. "I shall see that no one molests my mother and you to-night."

"But, Plácido, there is danger for us, is it not so?" Salomé asked tremulously. "We had heard of the burnings nearer and nearer, but naught of the concentration order of which thou art speaking. What will it mean for us?"

"That we also must go to the fort nearest Limonar, where the Spanish soldiers are, or even to Matanzas."

"And be prisoners of the Spaniards!" exclaimed Amada. "Never! Why, Plácido, you would not have us do such a thing until we are driven at the sword's point, as you say!"

Plácido buried his head in his hands.

"You, at least, will not go, cousin," Amada whispered. "You are a man and may escape into the woods and join our brave Gómez."

WAR

I will take care of my aunt, Plácido. It would be an evil thing for you, a man, to be driven like a silly sheep into the enemy's camp."

"I know, Amada," the man groaned. "But you little know the burden upon my heart to-night. How can I see you go — yet go you must, you and my old mother. There is rumor of an advance of Spanish troops in this direction. It is said that they leave a desert behind them. It has been many days now since Weyler published his order, and there is little mercy shown those who do not obey. But go to sleep, now, Amada. Go to bed, mamá, and let me think a little, alone, what is best to be done!"

For an hour Plácido sat motionless outside of the door of his home. The night was so peaceful about him that it seemed impossible that ruin should be at hand. He closed his eyes and tried to fancy how the place would look deserted of the three who loved it so well. He saw the dry thatching of browned palm leaves perhaps flare up in a hot blaze, and the heavy rafters, hewn by his own hand, collapse and fall inside of the smoking walls. The walls which it had been his pleasure to keep whitened and in repair would crumble away

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

to a ruin, and the trees would scorch and wither or be felled to the ground, after being stripped of their fruit. The hens and the pigs, and yes, even Amada's pet pigeons, would not think of saving themselves by flight, so tame and home-loving were they.

Plácido opened his eyes, and rose to his feet, shaking himself violently, as if to dissipate the vision he had invoked. The soft air kissed his burning cheek, and the quiet enveloping all nature as a slumber robe, mocked at his fears. But he had heard far worse details in Limonar than any he had confided to the women, and he knew that the time had come when a man could no longer remain neutral and pacific. He must leave home and his mother and Amada for some patriot rendezvous, lest the stigma of the shame of passive captivity should burn into his very soul. But he must assure himself of the fate of the two women before turning his back upon them for Cuba's sake. He knew of hiding places in plenty in the woods, where he might lurk for weeks almost in sight of the cottage roof. It would be possible to spend many an hour still at home, without fear of a surprise, and when the time should come for the abandon-

WAR

ment of the hut, he would linger among the shadows, and follow the fugitives as best he might to their place of "refuge", which term he already knew had become a synonym for imprisonment and suffering, for such is War!

He knew that neither his mother nor Amada would agree to enter the Spanish lines until forced to do so. Also he knew that had Salomé been a vigorous woman, nothing would have kept her from flight with him into the woods and away from present danger. But she was old now and too infirm from disease to totter a hundred yards from her own door. How then would it be possible for her to undergo the weary tramp of miles to even the nearest fort of the enemy?

Plácido struck his bare head with his hand at the misery of the thought. Certainly there was nothing to be done, after all, but to carry her himself, in his own strong arms, to some place of security in the forest, where Amada might still attend upon her, and all exist as long as they might upon the roots and berries and wild animals to be found in the woods near or far. But not to-night! She was asleep now, and Amada was too tired! Besides, there must be some preparation for

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

leaving home forever, and some spot selected as a refuge. To-morrow they would plan, and to-morrow night they would fly! Amada would be overjoyed at his decision, and would lend her ready hand and wit to every detail, and such a flitting would be very different from being driven by force.

Plácido had been strolling up and down the narrow path leading to the main road during the past quarter of an hour, and now at an unusual sound upon the road, he stood still and listened. He was at the exact spot where Amada had met him in the dusk scarcely an hour before, and therefore within a few steps of the road. The long grass hid him from sight, and the moon, late in her rising, had not yet shown her round face above the curve of the hill in the east.

Plácido knelt in the long grass at the edge of the grass patch, and laid his hand upon his heart as if to still its beating. For the sound he had heard had been like that made by a number of armed and mounted men, riding with spurs and clanking sword.

The horses' hoof-beats came nearer and nearer, and Plácido marked with relief, as the horsemen arrived abreast of him, that

WAR

they were but four in all, and in rollicking mood. Officers they seemed to be, and all evidently a little the worse for a recent stop at some roadside tavern, for they rolled in their saddles, and murmured snatches of Spanish street songs as they galloped past. Such a sight would not have been possible that night in the eastern half of the island, but the Spanish soldiery at this time had it almost their own way on the main roads of the four western provinces, and though the men were daring in thus trusting themselves unattended in an unfriendly district, after the shades of night had fallen, it was not an unheard of thing in the close neighborhood of troops at some friendly plantation or fortified city.

Swift and noiseless as a cat, Plácido slipped from the grass and entered the shadows of the road behind the equestrians. Ignoring all else in his frantic impulse to follow the officers and locate the position of the troops they represented, he trotted briskly in the rear for half a mile until they turned off suddenly and entered the avenue of trees leading into the great plantation of the Señor Nuñez!

“Ah! La Reseda then is occupied by Spanish

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

troops, and the grinding will begin again under the protection of their guns," Plácido thought rapidly, not staying his steps longer than to allow the last of the horsemen lagging behind the others to enter the open iron gates. "Only to-day they must have arrived while I was gone, and with more quiet than these four *caballeros* who have just passed. What a shame to the Señora's fine house! The Señor Nuñez himself is still in Havana, and will stay there with the family till the war ends, if Santiago tells the truth. *Caramba!* What is to be done, with the troops come within musket-shot of one's own door? It would have been better, perhaps, to have taken to the woods to-night! I wonder Amada's sharp little ears heard nothing of the soldiers even a mile away! But she was at the brook with her washing, poor child!"

CHAPTER IX

Unconquered yet, in that forlorn estate,
His manly courage overcame his fate.

DRYDEN.

PLÁCIDO, on noiseless feet, still followed the horses up the long avenue, of which every tree and stone was as familiar to him as the footpath through the grass at home. It was not long before he saw the lights of the mansion streaming through the open windows, and the odor of burning cigars and the sound of masculine voices were wafted to meet him, lurking in the darkness outside.

There must have been a large force quartered about the house, Plácido thought, so confident and at ease seemed the officers in possession.

No doubt, the Señor Nuñez had been more than willing to risk the use of his private property that he might profit by the protection of the troops of his own country in proceeding with the grinding of his cane, which had been in abeyance since the tactics of each army had

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

prohibited it for the other, under penalty of destruction of mill and growing cane.

Plácido soon lost sight of the four horsemen, who gave up their horses to orderlies at the verandah steps, and swaggered into the broad hallway beyond. He kept hidden in the shade of a clump of oleanders until the orderlies had ridden the mounts around to the back of the house, and then he crept toward one of the windows, still keeping in the shadow. The window-sill was low enough to enable him to see inside the room without difficulty, and one half of the lace curtain hung so that he was shielded from any careless glance from within. The shutters were wide open, and only the iron bars of the window intervened between him and the interior of the room.

It was the Señora's pretty morning room which was now occupied by half-a-dozen men, wearing the uniform of Spanish officers of different degrees. Their dusty boots had made tracks across the white matting, and their travel-stained figures sprawled on the delicate chairs and lounges, accustomed to the contact of dainty muslin and soft silken fabrics. One of the men who had just dismounted at the door, stood in front of a richly framed mirror,

WAR

and amused himself and any who chose to occupy themselves with his vanity, by curling the long, waxed ends of his mustachios, and dusting his reddened cheeks with the lady's own scented powder.

Plácido gave this fellow but a glance, as his eye caught a group about a small card-table closer to the window, which was of deeper interest to him. He could see the very expression upon the faces of the men, and the words they spoke were as intelligible as if addressed to himself as he pressed a little closer.

An officer, wearing a sash of yellow and red about his ample waist, was questioning a peasant, whose shambling, half-clothed figure was in marked contrast to the well-groomed man who eyed him with open disfavor.

With a start Plácido recognized in the peasant none other than Santiago Gámez from whom he had so recently parted in the road. Could keen-witted little Amada be right, and was the fellow a spy after all?

"Come, my angel, speak up!" a pert young aide exclaimed, apparently wearied with the examination, which was keeping them all from dinner. "You have promised to act as our guide to-morrow or find us a better, and have

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

given us all the details we wanted about the landed proprietors of chicken roosts and onion patches about here; now —”

“Peace, Luis,” interrupted his senior officer, who wore the sash. “leave the man to me a moment longer.” Then he turned to Santiago.

“The name of this fellow, who rents his bit of ground nearest to this place, who is ‘able-bodied and young, and who knows the woods like an owl’ — his name, what is it?”

“Plácido Ruiz, Señor Capitan,” Santiago replied.

“Has he women at home to make trouble?”

Santiago lifted his eyes, which had fallen to the floor, and, as if attracted by the unseen, burning gaze of those outside the window, directed them toward Plácido’s place of concealment.

“An old woman and a girl are all he has, Señor Capitan,” he drawled, though with an uneasy movement of his sandalled feet.

“They will go with us, of course, to the nearest post of concentration.”

“But Plácido will not go with you, Señor,” the other added, in his drawling tones.

“Have you not told me that he is a *pacífico*, and unfriendly to the rebellion, man?”

WAR

"Yet he will never take one step in your favor, Señor. Only this evening, with my own ears I heard him say that he would take pleasure in slashing off the head of any Spaniard in Cuba with his machete, and he carries a heavy and sharp-edged machete, Señor."

Plácido quivered with anger at this deliberate lie, but controlled himself and listened for the captain's reply, which was swift and summary.

"I will not ask you whether you told him of our presence here and plans, so go to the dogs with your palaver, you sneak," he thundered, turning his shoulder upon Santiago, and moving about some papers on the table with nervous touch. "You have taken my time for nothing, as I have learned only what I knew before too well, that the country is still full of Cubans too lazy to join their own men, and too vindictive to aid us. The sooner your own Cuba is rid of them the better, and tomorrow your Plácido goes with us, along with the women. See to yourself that you are caught in no lies, or the fine wages paid you by your benefactor, the Señor Nuñez, will be wanting, and you hanged as a spy. A bullet would be too good for you. Begone!"

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

Santiago was attended out of the room by a sly touch of the boot toe of the young aide who had before addressed him, and who now followed him to the door with a gibe upon his lips.

As his ragged figure disappeared from view behind the reed portière of the door, Plácido, sick with rage, turned away from the window — but only to step into the outstretched arms of the huge figure of a guard who seemed to rise from the ground at his feet.

Struggling and protesting, he was held in the grip of a mighty pair of arms, till the window was darkened by those crowding about it inside to learn the cause of the commotion without. A patrol had caught 'a low peasant fellow' spying into the room, that was all!

"Take him off and lock him up securely till to-morrow," ordered the captain briefly. "It is dinner-time now, and my appetite is more than half-spoiled already by the other fellow!"

So Plácido was hustled off across the yard and shoved into an outhouse, whose door was closed and bolted upon him, before he had had time to gather his wits and notice whither they were carrying him.

WAR

For a long time he stood still in the darkness, in the spot where he had remained when released from the burly grasp of the patrol. It seemed as if the blood would burst from his throbbing brain and temples, and his hands were clutched with such force that the marks of his finger-nails showed upon the palms for days afterward. Why had he allowed one man to so easily master him? Why had he not finished the fellow with a stroke of his keen-edged knife? He felt in his belt for the knife; it was no longer there! The patrol must have managed to slip it from its place — no, it must be lying that very moment on the palm log at home, where he had been idly nicking the bark of the log, while talking with Amada.

And now Amada lay sleeping innocently in her hammock, her round cheek resting in the warm palm of her little hand, as he had often seen her, when passing through the room at daybreak from his own cot in the adjoining shed. Salomé's gray head was also quietly pillowed under the palm thatching of the roof, but her bright dark eyes would be wakeful and watching for him, who had never yet left her without protection.

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

Plácido threw his arms above his head with a desperate gesture, and struck the dried thatch of the roof violently in the darkness. A shower of dust fell about his shoulders, but the sharp, rustling noise caused by the blow was as music to his ears. He laughed softly, and then sat down suddenly upon the ground to think.

He was not quite sure of his whereabouts, for there was a long row of outhouses on the outskirts of the lawn at La Reseda, all white-washed and palm-thatched, he recollected now, and some of the rooms were used as quarters for the house servants, one for provisions, another for gardening tools. If only that giant of a patrol had had the stupidity to imprison him in the tool-house, what could be easier than to find some sharp-edged instrument for ripping up the thatching of the roof? It was early yet, and a hole once made in the roof, he might soon be speeding homeward, among the shadows he knew by heart, and there would still be time to hurry the women to a place of safety, out of the moonlight into the shade of a thicket, whither even Santiago Gámez might not be able to direct the Señor Capitan to-morrow.

With his own hand, thought Plácido, he

WAR

would then fire the little homestead, creeping back in the grayness of dawn to apply the spark. No Spanish torch should burn the house built by himself with Salomé's help while Juan had lain in the shade of the temporary reed hut and directed the novices in their work !

An instinct of caution had kept Plácido quite still after that rustling blow of his clenched fists against the thatching. Some one might be close at hand who would notice any movement inside the place, and a musket-ball or sword-thrust in the dark might put an end to further plans. But as the minutes passed, and no voice or footstep sounded near, the man rose to his feet and felt around the bare walls of the room which could not have been more than a dozen feet square. It was not the tool-house, as a moment sufficed to prove to Plácido. The bare ground was covered with a litter of straw and dried grasses, and along the walls were ranges of boxes, empty of all save dead leaves and bits of straw.

"Ah ! it was here the children kept their pets !" Plácido whispered to himself. "All are gone now, and there is nothing to be found here that will help me. Still, with a pair of hands to work with, there is no reason for

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

my spending the night here. A pair of shears would have been quicker — or a match !” He felt in the pocket of his blouse for the box of tiny wax matches in which he indulged himself on each visit to the town. It was not there, — the small white box, bearing the brilliantly colored picture of a girl whose dark eyes had reminded him of Amada’s.

Sighing at the rude rebuffs of fate, Plácido then groped his way from the door to a corner of the room which he now knew was farthest from the house across the lawn, — the house which, although he could no longer see it, he knew was full of blazing light and suspicious ears.

With his work-toughened fingers, he began, in this corner, loosening bits of the thatching bound closely by interwoven strips of the inner bark of a tree of which the Cubans make a very strong cord. He was annoyed by the rustling of the dried palm leaves under his fingers, and presently stopped to listen for any signal of danger. It was well he did so, for voices now sounded clearly just outside the animals’ house, and the odor of strong cigars penetrated the roof which Plácido’s hands were attacking.

WAR

The prisoner could not tell how many persons had approached, but he very soon learned that they were in no hurry to leave his neighborhood. In fact, they seemed to have come to stay, for their easy accents and merry remarks, the whiffs of cigar smoke, and the intervals of silence between the jests proved that a group of friends had gathered close by in the moonlight, now perhaps stealing across the lawn, and who could tell how long poor Plácido's work might be interrupted. He still stood with arrested hand upraised, the hot blood again beating in his temples.

"They are soldiers who mean to sleep in the outhouses," he thought fiercely to himself, "or perhaps they will lie all night on the ground. *Válgame!* but I am an unfortunate man!"

By and by, the voices outside became more earnest and distinct. Plácido, pausing every few minutes in his slow and stealthy work, sometimes caught the words spoken in the abandon of perfect security. He had succeeded in loosening small bits of thatching until the stars peeped through the interstices and encouraged him in his labor. It was better to have even this to do than to sit idle in the darkness and hearken to the tones of the men

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

outside. He heard words which urged his fingers to hastier movements in their pickings overhead, and which sent his thoughts in a tumult of indignation and dread toward the two sleeping peacefully at home.

If the soldiers would only go inside now and settle down to sleep, he would make short work of the strands of cordage overhead, and springing through the rent would soon be out of hearing of their hateful tongues!"

"Hark! what was that scratching noise?" a gruff voice outside asked suddenly, and Plácido's heart stood still, — as still as his hands, in that second of dread.

"Perez is nervous to-night!" laughed another. "Perhaps what you heard, and what I did not hear, mind you, was the scratching of the ghosts of those ancient hens you provided for our dinner to-night.

"Perhaps," assented the gruff voice. "And have *you* heard no sound of a woman's shrieks, my brave Miguel? I should think your ears would be deafened by the 'ghosts' of certain cries I heard yesterday, while hunting the hens!"

"*Tonto!*" cried the other, no longer laughing, as rough applause from the rest greeted

WAR

this retort. "I did not hurt the child, and only snatched it from the mother to frighten her into telling us all we wished to know. It was you who struck the match and fired the roof."

During the noisy discussion that followed, Plácido made good progress with his hole, and though chafing at the delay of the soldiers in going to their rest in tent or house, he was comforted by the hope that they would surely not stay awake the whole of the night, and then —

"Peace, you fellows!" exclaimed a new voice, and a jingle of spurs against a stone outside warned Plácido of a fresh arrival.

"The Señor Capitan wishes to sleep and has shouted downstairs orders to the guards to cut the throats of every one found abroad at this hour. Get to your quarters and lose no time!"

There was a brief scuffling of feet and a muffled interchange of words, then silence again dwelt under the trees.

Now was Plácido's opportunity! Swinging himself up from the ground by laying hold of one of the beams supporting the thatch, he held himself suspended, while with his

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

teeth he gnawed frantically at the tough withes of bark still effectually obstructing the hole prepared for his exit.

Though a dried palm leaf or two still stretched loosely over this hole, the fresh air of heaven streamed in upon his heated face, and dried the drops of cold sweat upon his brow.

There! one withe was gnawed in two; one more, and Plácido would be free! Holy Mother of God! What was the man saying at the door?

"You gave him a good grip, Señor *soldado*,¹ but I have no doubt even I could have held Plácido Ruiz in my arms, so weak and womanish is he! Yes, I tell you it was Ruiz, and no other. I saw the look of his face as you hauled him across the yard. But let me tell you, Señor, an untiled roof and unguarded door do not become the prison of a rebel!"

Plácido dropped like a cat to the ground, and crept close to the door, panting with horrified amazement.

Again Santiago was lying at his expense! He, the white-livered half-breed, neither Spaniard, Cuban, negro, nor Chinaman, the weak,

¹ Soldier.

WAR

knock-kneed scoundrel, *he* boasting of strength and valor! Again the blood rushed from the heart of Plácido to his head, and then surged back again till the man thought he would suffocate.

"Very well, then," retorted a gruff voice, "if you can improve upon my work, fellow, sit you down here and guard the prisoner, and be responsible for his presence here in the morning. But do not imagine that you are to be trusted for an instant," the speaker seemed to call back over his shoulder with a sneer, in going away, "our guards are everywhere, and you shall be watched even as you watch the man in there."

"As if I would let him escape of my own will," the drawling voice continued in an undertone, on the other side of the door, while Plácido still stooped with his ear laid against the wood.

"Right into the trap he walked of himself with wide-open eyes, leaving my conscience as innocent of the guilt of it, as is the little cousin dreaming of him at home. *Caramba!* but will she believe me to-morrow when I tell her of her cousin's desertion of her and the crazy old woman? She is such a fiery

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

little beauty that one is half-afraid to meet the scorching of her eyes! But there will be scorching to-morrow of another kind, and she will have to listen to harder words than I shall speak —”

“Coward!” hissed Plácido between his teeth, but Santiago, absorbed in his own planings, heard nothing. His monologue ended in a hateful chuckle which further heated Plácido’s rage. Ah! if only the long knife or a machete had been at hand, would the two-inch board have kept the blade from entering the villain’s back pressed against the door outside?

There was now nothing to be done but wait till Santiago should fall asleep, or slip away to bed, faithless to his given word.

It seemed to Plácido as if he must cry aloud to the stars in his anguish. With the soldiers so close by — he could soon even hear the snores of one through the thin partition wall behind him — it would be impossible to escape through the roof while Santiago still sat against the door outside to give the alarm, and Plácido had only too much confidence now in the man’s desire to injure him to believe that he would willingly close his eyes while guarding the door.

WAR

Slowly and lingeringly passed the hours of the night. Slight movements of hand or foot outside, low yawns, low whistlings, and muttered words at intervals furnished the prisoner with undoubted proof of the special watcher's vigilance, while the tramp of spurred boots and the clank of a saber at regular intervals, gave token of other guards about the premises. At last even Plácido in his misery succumbed to a restless half-slumber.

He was roused after a while by a slight tickling in the palm of his hand, and sat up suddenly to find his fingers closing over a warm, quivering little body, which presently proceeded to run up the full sleeve of his cotton shirt. A faint squeaking noise issued from the gathers of his sleeve, and the man recognized the cry of a tiny creature in distress or fright. Shaking his sleeve vigorously, he tumbled the wee thing again into his big warm palm and recognized, by the feeling of the soft skin and long tail of the little animal, a mouse, perhaps one of Claudio's pets — the dainty white mice which Amada had loved so dearly. It must have been lost long days ago in the bustle of transferring the pets from boxes to traveling-cages, and in him now it had sought a

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

friend, and found one. For Plácido caressed the quivering little body against his cheek, and then thrust his hand, still holding the mouse, into the bosom of his blouse, where he kept it until the trusting little creature lay curled up asleep in his palm.

CHAPTER X

Wearied, forsaken and pursued at last,
All safety in despair of safety placed,
Courage he thence resumes, resolved to bear
All their assaults, since 'tis in vain to fear.

SIR J. DENHAM.

IN the prisoner's heart, meanwhile, hope had died a slow death, and he sat stroking the tiny refugee in his hand, with desperate eyes fastened on the floor.

Then, in the midst of the silence of the small hours of the night, while Plácido dozed in utter weariness, there suddenly broke upon his ear a sound of hastening feet and muffled cries of alarm.

At first he could make nothing of what he heard, but presently he knew that some, if not all of the troops, were hastening past his place of imprisonment in great confusion.

Little by little, a strong smell of burning vegetation reached his nostrils, and then most surprising words fell upon his ear, from close by.

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

Two soldiers had paused outside, and, from the rattle of tins, Plácido conjectured that they were packing up cooking utensils for a hasty leave-taking of the plantation. A moment before he had shivered with dread, from the suspicion that, if the Spaniards were really about to move hastily onwards, their victim would probably be shot first, for dead men told no tales, and each second he had expected to hear the bolt of his prison-hut withdrawn, and then a dreaded summons.

"Perez is certain that the peasant he caught last night has set the fire going," he heard one soldier say to the other, amid the rattling of tin pans. "The guard caught sight of a fellow sneaking away from the hut here, just half an hour ago, and it was his shot after the fugitive that roused the rest of us. The guard says he rushed up, and found a hole big enough for a man to slip through in the roof here on the other side —"

"Did he look inside?" the other voice asked carelessly.

"What was the use with the prisoner gone, and the flames already eating up the cane close by. Hurry, comrade, no matter about

WAR

the rest of the pans, we must get out of this. With the rebels close by, and the house already afire, we may have our eyebrows singed as it is! Look, the thatching at the other end of this row of huts is already in a blaze!"

"When we catch that snake in the grass, we'll show him what it means to —"

Plácido lost the rest of their words in the rattle and skurry of the departure of the men, and though from a distance came sounds of shouted orders, and the pounding of hoofs on the lawn nearer the house, no more soldiers approached his neighborhood.

In the midst of the increased smell of burning, and the rushing sound of a brisk breeze among the tree-tops, his head teeming with confused fancies as to the origin of the conflagration, Plácido was convinced of one thing, and this was that his own safety at the moment was due in part to Santiago, the false friend and spy, who must have fled from his post at the first signs of the burning of the cane. How fortunate it was for Plácido that Santiago had been sighted by the sentry in the act of fleeing, and believed to be the escaping prisoner; otherwise the hut would have been searched, and he himself

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

dragged out by some guard or officer possessed of too good a memory.

And the discovered hole in the roof had proved as effectual as if he had really slipped through and away! *Caramba!* what was to prevent his using the hole now? Was he to stay there to be scorched and goaded to flight by the burning thatch overhead. Even now he could hear the crackling of the flames devouring the roofs at a little distance along the row of outhouses, while his prison was no longer dark within, but lighted by fire flashes.

There were no sounds of voices or footsteps now. He swung himself up by the beam as he had before done, and thrust his head from the opening in the roof. Morning had not yet dawned, but the whole scene was brightly lighted by the fires around. Volumes of smoke rose to the dark sky, and an orange-red sea of flame was swallowing up the waving cane with greedy haste.

Twisting his head so that he might command the dwelling-house and its immediate premises across the yard, Plácido saw that billows of smoke were puffing from the lower windows, while not a soul was in sight anywhere. He gasped with dismay at the sight of the burning

WAR

house, and at the thought of the rich treasure of silken hangings, of books and pictures, of piano and plate, at the mercy of the flames.

Little he knew of the capacity of saddlebag and knapsack of the retreating soldier, and it is doubtful if his honest soul would have been comforted had he known that much of the portable treasure of the Señor Nuñez had now gone galloping off with the soldiers toward Matanzas.

With a spring and a scramble, Plácido lost no time in leaving his prison for what seemed to him a world of fire from end to end. The little mouse had been tenderly transferred to the deep pocket of his blouse, and was safe from harm. He crept cautiously along on the ground in the shelter of the cactus hedge, toward the cane, rather than in the direction of the house, lest he should still encounter an enemy more deadly than the flames. Once, he thought he heard a long scream of warning or of agony, coming he knew not whence. A lightning thought of Santiago flashed with curious distinctness across his mind, and he dropped to the ground, where he lay motionless until he dared tarry no longer.

Skirting the cane, and avoiding all paths

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

and the avenue, he presently came out upon the road, with the fire at his back, and the long, waving grass of the fields inviting him to the security of its depths. He dived into the sea of grayish green, and patiently crept on hands and knees in the direction of home. The wind blew steadily from the southwest, and by and by perhaps, this grass also would ignite from the flying sparks behind, and bear destruction to his own thatched hut.

Even this would not matter if he could manage to hasten his mother and Amada away to the forest, where, with the aid of his machete, it would be an easy task with brush and palm leaves to raise a shelter from the dews of night. If only the troops had passed on by the little whitewashed hut, too much in dread of ambush to spend precious moments over the destruction of a peasant's home, and the frightening of two helpless women!

Plácido panted with exhaustion before he dared rise to his feet and peer across the field in the direction of home. His hands and knees were bruised and stiffened, and his strength almost spent, but he must crawl and creep so long as there was danger of being surprised by a lingering foe.

WAR

Whether patriot or Spaniard had fired the cane, and whether the burning of the great house was due to accident or not, was of little importance to him now, in comparison with his consuming desire for a sight of the fruit trees and his own whitewashed walls. Would Amada be awake, and frightened almost to death by the glow of the fire devouring the home of Violeta and Claudio? Would his mother be praying upon her cot, half to the Virgin Mary, half to her dead husband Juan, as was her way lately, when in greatest straits of body or mind? How long a time it had been since Amada had sprung out of this very grass to meet him, and then had tripped lightly on before along the path!

He must be nearing home now — Ah! that was a prick of the barbed wire fence inclosing his bit of land! His forehead had struck against the wire with some force, and as he lifted his face, warm drops of blood trickled down upon his temple from the scratch.

There was no sign of living being abroad, as Plácido discovered after a tense moment of watching. He crawled under the lowest wire then, and rose stiffly to his feet. A

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

glimmer of white met his eyes, and with a stifled cry of gladness he sprang forward, only to stop suddenly the next moment, and fling up his arms in the old gesture of despair. With the low moaning of a brute in distress, he then crept on lagging feet nearer and nearer the smoking ruin of his home. The wall on the windward side had been left unblackened by the smoke of the burning thatch, and it was its unimpaired whiteness which had given him that one instant of joyous relief. But fire had done its work here also, and nothing which could be burned had escaped. The roofless adobe walls were all that remained to tell the tale. Even the old palm log outside the crumbling doorway was becoming a smouldering mass of embers. The walls were still heated, although all flames had died away with the consumption of the last bit of simple furniture inside. Little curls of smoke rose from the mass of charred thatching fallen in a heap in the midst of the empty walls.

How quickly it all must have happened, — the adobes still hot, the beams still smoking, — and yet not a vestige of Amada and the poor old mother to be seen ! A pigeon or two

WAR

fluttered high above the ruins, but of other animal life there was naught visible. The pigs and hens must have sought safety in flight, or have been hunted to death by the destroyers in an incredibly short space of time.

Round and round the desolate spot Plácido tramped on untiring feet, searching among the shadows under the trees, poking into the thickets of weeds, even peering among the branches of the guava tree for a sign of those whom he loved. Once, he lifted his voice and called Amada's name in tones hoarse from exhaustion and anguish. But there was no answer, although in the abandonment of despair he had forgotten all caution, and had called loudly in the midst of the silence and solitude of the breaking day.

The flames died down about the desolated plantation a mile away, and the breeze fell with the dawn. Plácido, crouching at the foot of one of his lime trees, sat with his white face turned upon the ruins of his own home, and mechanically fondled the little animal nestling warmly in his bosom. There was comfort in the touch of the wee creature, but as yet no comfort could reach the desolation of Plácido's heart.

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

His back was toward the sun's rising, the wondrous sun's rising of the tropics, when the genial old god of day springs from the depths of the invisible into the eastern glory of crimson and gold sent ahead of him, without the long preparation of hazy twilight and slow-creeping morn of northern latitudes. Ere-long, level rays of cheering light swept across the fields and chased the shadows of night before them into forest and swamp land. But they only showed more plainly to Plácido the horror of his situation.

Now that the light had come, he knew that he ought to enter the broken walls and search for — what? He rose and staggered toward the doorway, his bloodshot eyes shrinking from the smoking heap in the center of what had been the front room. Was that a bit of faded blue cotton protruding from the ashes at his feet? The man threw himself upon the ground and clawed fiercely at the still smouldering thatch, with labored pants for breathing, and unheeding the scorching of his hands and knees. No, it was only a fragment of dull blue crockery, the half of a plate which he had long ago brought home to Amada from a fair in Limonar. The child

WAR

had laughed aloud at sight of the queer pictures on the plate, and had always eaten her rice from it since that day. Plácido laid the fragment carefully aside, and went on with his search, till he was sure there was no grewsome remnant of human life among the ashes.

"They are gone with the enemy," he muttered to himself, "and I would rather they had been burned alive! Death to the Spaniards, and may the vultures pick their bones!"

A sullen glow of hatred filled the great, tender eyes of the man groveling in the ashes of his house, and a shudder convulsed his crouching figure. It passed, and he rose quickly to his feet. Without one backward glance, he strode fiercely out of the doorway and started to plunge into the long grass and hasten thence to the shelter of the hills, where he might no longer be tortured by the silence and the emptiness of what had been the center of the world to him.

A sudden recollection stayed his steps. How could his lame old mother have accompanied the troops on their hasty march? She must have fallen by the wayside, ere many

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

faltering steps had been taken; might she not even now be gasping out her life in the ruddy dust of the highway?

Plácido sprang back into the narrow path, and was surprised to hear himself laughing aloud as he rushed away. Was he going mad, as he had heard of suffering *pacíficos* doing when deprived by sword and flame of everything but miserable life itself? He sobered instantly at the thought, and a degree of coolness returned to his heated brain. He pushed back the long locks of black hair which had tumbled about his face from his uncovered head, and pressed his hand on his palpitating heart. Something moved slightly under his fingers, and then the quick, bright eyes of the little mouse peered curiously over the edge of his blouse pocket.

“Ah! little comrade!” Plácido murmured gently, “thou wouldst best keep thy head covered, and thine eyes closed upon such a world as this. But stay, wouldst thou be free again? Then, go if thou wilt, only beware of the heel of man, if the man be a Spaniard!” So saying, he stooped in the path, and softly placed the tender little creature upon the ground at his feet. The

WAR

mouse hesitated a moment, then scampered a few inches away from Plácido's toes, the big man meanwhile watching with a softened expression on his sorrow-lined face. The next instant, the mouse turned and came flying back to his friend, and without ado ran up his body and proceeded to search for his former warm hiding-place in the welcoming palm.

"Then come, and we will live and die together!" the man whispered into the quivering little face rubbed inquisitively against his chin.

The road which Plácido presently skirted in the long grass of the fields edging it, was deserted of friend and foe. The sunshine which yesterday would have blazed along its unshaded length, was to-day caught and held in the trail of heavy smoke brooding over the landscape, and the bright face of the sun itself shone at last through a blood-red veil.

Plácido searched along the way as far as he dared, toward the neighborhood of one of the Spanish forts on the outskirts of the railroad proceeding from Limonar, and much farther than it would have been possible for Salomé's tottering limbs to have borne her.

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

At last he came to a pause, and drawn by an irresistible fascination, turned back, and again hastened through the grass in the direction whence he had just come. On the way his quickened ear caught the sound of voices along the road, and the dread-inspiring pounding of horses' hoofs in the dust. He threw himself at full length in the grass, and waited till the party had passed — a dozen mounted men, driving before them a group of Cuban peasants, all women and children excepting one old man.

Plácido buried his face upon his arms after one peering glance upward from the grass-grown ditch into which he had stumbled. They passed all too swiftly, but Plácido was glad when the piteous little group was out of sight, swallowed up in the dust of the highway. If his straining eyes had found his mother and Amada among the little band, he would have followed them to the very gates of the Fort — but here he was alone, unarmed, homeless, friendless, adrift in the wide world of Cuba. Once more he must seek the ruins, and find, if possible, his machete and his knife. Possessed of these, he would linger in the neighborhood, hidden by day

WAR

in the canebrakes and thickets, and by night he would sally forth in search of his beloved ones. If time should prove that these were lost to him, there still remained Cuba and Maceo and Gómez !

He reached the ruins again in safety and with sinking heart searched the ground about the palm log for both instruments, which he remembered having left lying there the evening before. No machete was to be found ; perhaps even now some Spanish soldier was gloating over the prize, for Plácido's machete was heavy of weight and keen of edge, and worth more than its weight in gold to the prowler in tangled swamp and forest. Still the knife would be of good service, and he found it quite unharmed, though scarred and blackened from the heat of its fiery resting-place among the embers of the palm log.

With a final wrench of the heart, the man was again about to tear himself from the home-spot when one more recollection startled him into a second search among the ruins. Straight as a dart, he sped to a hole in the inner side of a part of the wall which had enclosed his own small room, and thrust his arm far into the hole. Withdrawing his

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

sleeve, all dusty and begrimed with smoke, a small packet showed in his fingers, the sight of which brought a curious mocking smile to the firmly set lips.

He unfolded the coarse wrapper, and Amada's card lay in his palm, the purple and gold of the pansies a little dulled from frequent handling. Then with passionate fingers, Plácido suddenly tore the card into atoms, and with a wide sweep of his arm scattered them over the embers of his home.

"May the Altísimo forgive me, but how can He expect me to do aught else but hate the despoilers of my own people?" he cried, lifting his empty arms to the smoke-stained sky.

Then, as with a long, sighing groan his arms fell to his sides, the outcast bade farewell to his home, and plunged into the grass again.

PART THIRD

MACHETE

“When thee builds a prison, thee had better build with the thought ever in thy mind that thee and thy children may occupy the cells.”

ELIZABETH FRY TO THE KING OF FRANCE.

CHAPTER XI

But what avail her unexhausted stores,
Her bloomy mountains, and her sunny shores,
With all the gifts that heaven and earth impart,
The smiles of nature and the charms of art,
While proud oppression in her valleys reigns,
And tyranny usurps her happy plains?

ADDISON.

DEEP in a patch of woods in Havana province, where the tangle of vines and trees was well-nigh impenetrable save under the stroke of the keenest of machete blades, a small band of the patriot army was encamped toward the end of 1897.

The rainy season of that year was over, during which period the armies, both Spanish and Cuban, had been in a state of comparative inactivity, owing to the interruptions caused by the rains and illness among the troops.

Heavy rainstorms and the burning sun had rejuvenated the island from east to west, so far as Nature had any power, where man

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

in his rages, in his reprisals, and in his righteous indignation, had left any foothold for Nature's forces. The luxuriant depths of this bit of woodland offered a sharp contrast to the open country of the whole western half of the island which, by this time, the two armies had converted from a scene of marvelous fertility into a blasted wilderness, with every green and growing thing cut down, and every plant uprooted.¹

General Weyler's fatal order of concentration had long since depopulated the winding valleys and verdant plains of western Cuba, only to gorge the cities and towns of Spanish occupation with starving and fever-stricken country folk, who were become alike a burden upon the authorities, a terror to the residents, and a curse to themselves. Weyler himself had been replaced by Ramón Blanco, and still Cuba struggled and endured.

Happy the bands of men and the few courageous and hardy women, who formed links of the insurgent army throughout the "peerless island"! For even the steams of tropical noons among the swamps and the cold dews of nights on the hillsides were

¹ See "Real Condition of Cuba To-day" [1897], Stephen Bonsal.

MACHETE

preferable to the insufferable stench and heartrending sufferings and sounds of the overcrowded pens of the *pacíficos*, about the fortified towns. A year had passed since the concentration order had gone forth, and since Plácido had come home from Limonar to tell the news to his mother and Amada and, with the ending of the rains, had begun another campaign in the war-stricken land. Few recruits could now be expected in the patriot lines, for most of those Cuban *pacíficos* who had not been hurried into the towns had long since fled to the encampments of the insurgent commanders, in the name of "Cuba Libre."

On the other hand, fresh troops had arrived from Spain, beardless youths straight from their mother's arms, hopeful of speedy victory and renown, along with those of riper age who remembered the end of the struggles for independence in others of Spain's countries in the western world, and who were thinking less of laurel crowns now than of their own vineyards and pumpkin lands in Spain.

The end of it all was uncertain, although the doughty Gómez was still strong in his hope of ultimate victory.

Near Punta Brava, Antonio Maceo had

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

fallen, it is true, but his daring spirit still survived in men who rode fearlessly, and who planned desperately to the discomfiture of the enemy.

It was night in the forest depths, and cries of strange wild creatures broke the silence about the sleeping camp. At each rustle of the underbrush, or whirr of passing wings, a rough black head was raised from its leafy pillow under a certain *rancho*¹ and bright, dark eyes stared wakefully out into the darkness. Amada Trueno was unable to sleep, for disturbing thoughts filled her mind and made uneasy the fragrant pillow of leaves beneath her head.

"If the *asistente*² had only allowed me to act as guard even to the horses!" the girl muttered to herself once, when the far-off neigh of a tethered horse reached her listening ear. Even the neighing of the horse seemed muffled to suit the exigencies of the time, but Amada lay still no longer. Slipping as quietly as possible from her bed of dry leaves, she stole from under the thatching

¹ A shelter of brush or palm leaves in the forest, sometimes reinforced by a bit of tenting or rubber cloth.

² Officer's orderly or servant.

MACHETE

of the *rancho*, with only one backward glance at the woman resting at her side.

"Juanita sleeps to-night as if we were to stay on here in the woods for a hundred years," she thought impatiently, as she stole past other *ranchos* curtained with darkness. "I am glad we are to meet the enemy after all this long waiting and hiding. If only our Colonel's messenger would come, with the orders Captain Tercera has been waiting for all these days! Juanita says she would be glad too, if it were not for the baby, but the little one will hardly enjoy a gallop as much as I shall!"

"There!" she almost cried aloud, a moment after, as she stole within sight of a sentry leaning motionless against the trunk of a gigantic palm tree. "They say that women and girls are not fit for midnight watching, and there is Brígido fast asleep by the tree."

"Never mind," her thoughts ran swiftly on, "he is very tired with standing so long, and sleepy too, no doubt, after riding all last night in search of food for us. I will sit down here at his feet and watch for the messenger."

Accordingly, she crouched on a stump close

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

by the still figure with the rifle planted at its side, and gazed with her clear, full eyes in the direction of what she knew was one of the blind paths leading into the encampment.

The man on guard at this point was indeed asleep, and his shirt of faded flannel was hardly distinguishable from the massive gray tree trunk upon which he leaned.

Once or twice Amada shivered a little as the chill of night struck upon her shoulders, protected only by a boy's thin jacket, but after all the young blood throbbed warmly in her veins, and her thoughts were far from present discomforts. It was a pleasure to be doing something for one whose wife had been always kind to her, and who was, besides, the father of the fine baby boy asleep in his mother's arms under the *rancho*.

The fact that Brígido and Juana were mulattoes made no manner of difference to the hardy Cuban girl, who for more than a year now had shared the fortunes of one or another of the roving detachments of insurgents.

In the beginning of the rainy season just past, Captain Tercera from ambush had dis-

MACHETE

persed a band of Spanish troops surrounding and threatening destruction to a train of camp servants and followers which had become separated from a large body of the insurgents marching eastward.

Amada, who had ridden with this *impedimenta*, had begged to join Captain Tercera's small force of mounted men, which just then was moving in the direction of Havana, and her request had been granted, although few officers desired the presence of helpless women in camp. Still, Amada was young and vigorous, and bright-eyed withal, and there was one brave woman already in his ranks, and Captain Tercera soon found that there would be no cause for regretting the admission of little Cuba Libre into his rainy-season quarters.

The girl had never spoken much of herself to any one, and even the soldiers of the first patriot band to which she had belonged knew little beyond the fact that one moonlight night, long months before, they had found her sitting wide-eyed and dumb beside the quiet corpse of a gray-haired woman on the edge of a jungle of cane and reeds.

These patriot soldiers had been returning

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

from a midnight reconnoiter of the country about Limonar, and hearing that the sugar mill belonging to a certain Nuñez, a violent sympathizer with Spanish interests, was soon to be in full blast, grinding cane under the protection of Spanish troops, they had fired the cane, and hurried on by a country road to the shelter of the pathless woods.

On finding the girl beside the dead woman, they had plied her with questions, which gave them the information that she and her aged aunt, in terror of the enemy, had an instant before fled from their hut at sight of the burning cane. The woman had fallen when but a few feet beyond her own threshold, and the girl had dragged the limp body away with her to the thicket of cane.

"Plácido will come here to find my aunt and me," she had said, when the men had invited her to accompany them to a place of more safety. "He knows the place well, for we have often come here —"

"Your 'Plácido' would rather find you a live girl somewhere else, than both of you dead here in the canebrake," the leader had insisted, and he had succeeded in convincing her that Salomé was really dead, and that she

MACHETE

herself was in danger, while lingering so near to the enemy's route.

But Amada had yielded to this insistence only after the men had agreed to bear away the body of Salomé with them to some place where it would be possible to bury it. Nor would she submit to be dragged to a seat on a horse behind one of the soldiers, until she had seen the poor dead body clasped in the arms of another private, and already on the way to safety.

The colloquy had lasted only a few seconds, and the men were chafing to be gone, yet one more detention occurred before they were finally off. Scarcely had the horse bearing Amada taken a dozen steps before the man occupying the saddle felt the little hands release his belt as the girl slipped to the ground and sped away into the darkness.

"She is crazed by fright," he thought, yet his loud ejaculation of surprise had given the alarm, and the other horsemen closed about him in breathless suspense, although they dared not return and so kept on their way.

Half an hour later; as they crouched in hiding, a mile from the scene of the burning, Amada had appeared among them with eyes

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

a-glitter and noiseless step. The sentry had challenged her for the password as she approached, and her quick rejoinder "I am little Cuba Libre," had opened ready way for her.

"I went back to set fire to our house," she gasped faintly, dropping on the ground at the feet of the leader. "There were matches left on the shelf, and it took but a moment. I heard the troops passing in the road, but I had no fear. Never again shall I run from a Spaniard!"

In her hand she carried Plácido's machete which she had found near the doorway. She had followed the path of the patriots with only slight difficulty, for the moon had risen, and shone here and there through the tangle upon sapling and vine cleared out of the path by machete strokes. Besides, the horses had neighed, and Amada's hearing was good and her wits keen.

Now for five months she had belonged to Captain Tercera's command, and the name by which she had introduced herself to the picket guard had clung to her, until her real name was almost forgotten by the friends about her.

MACHETE

As she sat on the stump, watching in the place of the slumbering Brígido, she wished that the time might come when she should meet a Spaniard face to face, in open battle. It would be better than to crouch behind stone walls or in the long grass to fire upon them passing by, when they could not see that even girls of Cuba were not afraid to fight. She had an old pistol, a big-barrelled, clumsy affair, which she had been allowed to take with her own hands from the body of a dead Cuban found one day in the trail of the enemy, but long ago the few cartridges which could be spared her had been exhausted and yet not one Spaniard as yet, had she seen fall under her hand! How proud would be the moment when, some day, she might urge her white mule into the thick of the fray, and "give" the machete, with all the force of her muscular young arm, to an enemy!

Other wrongs gnawed at her heart besides the spoliation of her father's garden and the injury to little Consuelo in the street of Havana. For now she was suffering as all other Cuban women suffered, having had death and ruin as close companions since that last peaceful resting on the palm log under the

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

stars, when Plácido had promised to take care of them all the night through.

Of course, Plácido was dead also, or he would never have left two women alone that sorrowful night. Long ago she had given up all hope of ever seeing him again.

Memories of the past often beset her in the midst of her wanderings here and there, the hurrying from field to wood, from wood to field, the fruitless skirmishings with the enemy, the monotonous hidings, the long, hungry days, the cold, weary nights. But she rarely spoke of the past, and never complained of hardship, and the sturdy patience and clear-headedness of little Cuba Libre had bound the heart of rough private and gallant leader to her in sincere admiration.

Now, in the midst of her wild life, she was thrilled by but one ambition — to face the foe in open battle, and to prove, once for all, that a childish fear of them no longer existed in her womanly heart. Perhaps, now, tomorrow or next day, there would be given her the opportunity she coveted, for there were rumors abroad of the passing of a detachment of Spanish troops, some miles away from the present encampment, and as the troops were

MACHETE

said to be guarding a supply of ammunition and provisions intended for some inland fort, it would be worth a good deal of risk to attempt the dispersion of the band, and the capture of the prize.

Captain Tercera, therefore, was awaiting with anxiety the messenger from his superior giving more certain news of the enemy's movements — yet Captain Tercera lay sleeping quietly under his leafy *rancho*, where close by only a girl kept watch under the stars!

CHAPTER XII

Hide me, forests, in your close bowers.

GAY.

WHEN, by and by, a long, low whistle twice repeated caught Amada's quick ear, she had only to reach out her hand and lay it upon Brígido's arm. The man started, gazed wildly around, then clutched his rifle with shaking hands. A rustling of the bushes in front already told of the approach of some one, but Brígido was too dazed to give the Cuban challenge, and, "*Alto! quien va?*" smote clearly upon the stillness in the girl's fresh young voice, before the sentry had time to collect his senses.

"*Amigos de Cuba Libre!*"² was the prompt reply, as three or four dusky shapes filed between the tree trunks and halted before Brígido.

¹ Halt! Who goes there?

² Friends of Free Cuba.

MACHETE

The picket, quite himself again and recognizing friends, motioned the newcomers onward toward the center of the encampment where the Captain's *rancho* stood fifty feet or so removed from those of the other soldiers and the *asistentes*. The men passed on in silence, without noticing Amada in the gloom, and she was about to follow them with eager step, when she felt a strong hand laid heavily upon her shoulder.

"Stay, girl, did you hear a signal from the men who have just come, or did they foolishly creep upon us without word or whistle?" The sentry's tones were sharp with anxiety, and his grasp so fierce that Amada's shoulder ached, and she shrugged to release herself.

"They whistled!" she answered briefly. "Let me go, Brígido, for the love of God!"

"And for sleeping on guard let myself get shot like a dog?" the mulatto muttered grimly. "No, indeed, little Cuba Libre." And he made a motion of his big hand toward the girl's slim throat.

"For shame!" Amada cried indignantly, yet moving not an inch from where she stood looking up into the man's face. "I never thought of telling tales. I knew you were

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

tired, and so I sat here watching in your place. Take your hand from my shoulder, and let me go."

Brígido glared down upon her with evil in his eye, but as Amada still held her face upturned toward his and made neither outcry nor struggle, his brow cleared, and he relaxed his hold.

"Girls cannot keep secrets —" he said hesitatingly.

"But they can spare the life of a friend," was the quick retort, "and they can keep secrets also, as you will find out. Do you think I have forgotten that you are the baby's father? I love Chico, and I shall never tell that you were asleep!"

"Then go, child, for I am breaking more rules standing here talking to you," Brígido said good-naturedly.

He felt that he really could trust little Cuba Libre, for he knew that her love for the baby, Chico, was almost as great as the mother's own.

Amada bounded from the spot, and presently stole into the deeper shadow bordering a circle of vivid orange light. A fire was being hastily kindled by an *asistente*, that

MACHETE

the captain might interview the midnight visitors, who had left their horses tethered nearer the road.

One of the messengers was putting a paper into the hands of the just awakened leader. The gray trousers of the riders were mud-stained and ragged, and the men showed signs of weariness in their slouching figures and short-coming breath.

One of them drew a blazing stick from the fire and held it behind Captain Tercera so that the officer might read the order brought by the messengers.

The light from the torch flared in the faces of the men, and as it fell upon the countenance of the one who held it and whose wide hat brim was abruptly turned back from his forehead, Amada gasped, and then suddenly sat down upon the ground where she stood.

She had advanced in her eagerness toward the fire, and now, with startled gaze, from her seat on the ground, she fixed her eyes upon the gaunt, bronzed features of the man wearing the palm hat with upturned brim.

Was it the ghost of Plácido himself? Indeed, the great brown eyes looking down upon the little captain's shadowed face were

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

like Plácido's, and the broad, slightly stooping shoulders were his, as was the long black hair caught behind the ears to be out of the way. But the bronzed cheeks were hollow, and the fingers that had gripped the blazing stick were as the fingers of a skeleton. Amada sighed, yet if it had not been for the alert expression of the face and the intense gaze of the eyes, which brought a deep line between the black brows, the man might really have been Plácido. But *his* eyes were as gentle as those of "General Campos", the great white ox at La Reseda, and his mouth as tender as any woman's!

As she sat there, alone and unnoticed, a gurgling cry from Chico in the *rancho* close by, clamoring for the attention of his sleeping mother, caused the "ghost of Plácido" to start in his place and glance hastily around.

Instinctively Amada crouched lower upon the ground, and spread both small brown hands over her cropped head. Almost as if the man had been her cousin she shrank from his recognizing her in her boyish fashion of dressing — a fashion of necessity and to which the strangers' eyes about her had long been accustomed. She would sit on the

MACHETE

ground, therefore, with her shorn black head hidden in the darkness until the men were gone, or had disposed of themselves for the night, then she would forget all about the apparition and busy herself with learning what she could of the proposed attack. Meanwhile, she would listen with ears wide open —

“And your name?” questioned Captain Tercera, raising his sharp black eyes from the paper in his hand. “The Colonel says that the bearer of this will act as guide to my troop to-night, to bring me into possible conjunction with him.” He was looking up at the man wearing the upturned hat, and the answer came clearly and promptly from the bearded lips.

“Plácido Ruiz, to serve you, my Captain !”

Was she going to expire right there, with the heart-beats dying away in her bosom, and the cold creeping to her brain? Amada realized nothing more with clearness until a well-beloved voice called out loudly, from just above where she crouched on the ground :

“Look out, *compañero*,¹ you are trampling a child ! Have you no eyes to see the boy

¹ Comrade.

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

asleep here on the ground?" And Plácido's own hand reached out to meet Amada's raised appealingly toward him.

"Children have no business in camp," a rough voice muttered, as three of the strangers passed on, returning to the horses.

"That long-limbed fellow on the ground 'a child'!" laughed another, "more likely a lazy *asistente* skulking, lest —"

The rest of the words were lost in the distance and darkness, but the first speaker, who seemed a superior among the newcomers, had not followed the others, after separating from the captain.

"Did the fellow's boots trample you?" he asked, still holding the cold little hand, and staring curiously at the shivering, boyish figure before him. But Amada, for reply, only snatched her hand from his grasp and disappeared from sight in the darkness edging the space lighted by the glow of the little fire.

"*Caramba!*" muttered Plácido, throwing himself wearily upon the ground where he stood, and straightway falling asleep, though even now preparations were being made around him for leaving camp in an hour.

MACHETE

Amada had darted away and into the shadow of the low roof of the *rancho*, where she was accustomed to sleep beside Juana and the baby. As if possessed, she flung herself on the broad cot made of saplings, and vehemently hugged the child which she caught up from its mother's breast.

Chico, as was natural, rebelled at such treatment even from his playmate and adorer, and kicked manfully with his sturdy legs, amid protesting cries.

"The child will be the death of us some day," a soldier complained, as he passed in the darkness. Captain Tercera, also hearing the cry, resolved on the spot, that the time had come for prohibiting, on such forced marches as that night's promised to be, the attendance of wife or children of his men, — of even so faithful a man as the big private Brígido, though the woman had been of use in helping the *asistentes*, and in nursing the sick and wounded, even since the baby had arrived, some months before, and she had proved herself as hardy as any man in undergoing the rough discipline of camp and road. No woman he knew could have borne what the merry Juanita had borne, except

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

— always excepting little Cuba Libre of course — the soldier-girl who so hated her boy's attire, and close-cropped hair !

One would scarcely have recognized the timid figure, presently stealing up behind the sleeping cavalryman recently arrived at the camp, for the same which had stood defiant and indignant before the threats of the big sentry, a while before. Over the ragged rolled-up trousers which she detested, but which had fallen to her share in a division of booty, Amada had slipped a short skirt belonging to Juana, and which she had just now unceremoniously appropriated from the baby's naked limbs. She had grown so tall that six inches of bare leg showed below the hem of her skirt, but that was of small moment and scarcely noticed by the wearer. She sat down close at Plácido's head, and watched the measured rising and falling of the broad chest, the man's face being covered by the tilting of his hat.

The whole camp was astir now, yet the sleeper still slumbered, and no one disturbed him. Juana, roused at last, and finding the skirt gone from the baby's limbs, wrapped him in her long scarflike shawl,

MACHETE

naked as he was, and laughed to herself as she did so.

"Little Cuba Libre has many times said she would exchange her trousers for my boy's skirt," she thought to herself, "and now I suppose she has helped herself, having already given me warning. The saints bless her for a true, brave girl, and my boy will never know the difference. She may keep the trousers, too, for aught I care, as my Chico would be lost even in one of their pockets!"

The noise increased, and some of the men had already moved off along the winding trails to the horses, while Brígido and the other pickets appeared from farther recesses of the woods. The commotion at last roused Plácido, and he turned uncomfortably, murmuring "*Amadita mia!*" under the brim of his hat.

Amada heard and choked suffocatingly. At the same moment there came the cry "*Adelante!*"¹

Hearing the order even in his dreams, Plácido sprang to his feet, and with no eyes for the eager-lipped girl about to call his

¹ Forward!

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

name, he sprang to his feet and strode away. His services would not be needed until they should be out of this body of wood, and he took his place with the rest of the command, filing silently along one of the blind paths leading to the horses. Amada, meanwhile, stood gazing after the man until he was out of sight, then she turned her face from the trees which had hidden him among their shadows and joined Juana, who, with the baby, was watching the mustering and departure of the last of the men.

CHAPTER XIII

Who sees these dismal heaps but would demand
What barbarous invader sacked the land?

SIR J. DENHAM.

AS Captain Tercera's band was small, numbering but twenty-seven armed men, the *impedimenta*¹ was correspondingly small, half a dozen mules and donkeys sufficing to bear cook, *asistentes*, women, pots, pans, and hammocks, from place to place. In accordance with the captain's hasty resolve, orders were given for leaving the *impedimenta* behind in the security of the wood on this occasion, the present expedition partaking of the nature of a raid, and the captain expecting to return with the troop under the protection of the succeeding night.

Great was Amada's dismay at learning from Juana that girls were not expected to take part in this flying expedition, where

¹ The company of unarmed servants and camp followers, in charge of camping outfit and the sick, attached in more or less numbers to every command.

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

there might be danger of a lively sort to be encountered. But little Cuba Libre did not waste time in fruitless complainings over the disappointment. Instead, she sprang away, even with Juana's unwelcome communication unfinished, and in the twinkle of an eye, had bounded into the improvised *corral*, where the mules of the *impedimenta* were still gazing stupidly after the departing forms of their late companions.

Amada sprang upon the thin straw-stuffed cushion, which hours before she had bound upon the back of the old white mule, which for a long time had been relegated to her use, and after a good deal of effort succeeded in inducing him to follow the trail taken by the horsemen.

At least, they would be traveling the road together, Plácido and herself, and by and by the sudden light of the morning would come, and she would urge old Julio closer and closer to the rear of the troop, so that she might watch the broad shoulders clothed in faded gray and touched by the long straight wisps of black hair, and imagine that this new Plácido was really her gentle cousin riding after the enemy!

MACHETE

If there were shrugs of the shoulders among the silent horsemen, who presently detected the shadowy mule and rider stealing up behind them, there were covert smiles of approval as well, and little Cuba Libre was not turned back.

Two hours later, the sun peeped above the horizon and then glared across the fields; the desolated fields where weeds and grass strove to hide with green, here and there, the scars of war. Captain Tercera's little company of men had reached the rendezvous appointed by the superior officer, but, as yet, they were quite alone, crouching behind heaps of the broken wall fronting a small plantation long since given over to ruin and desolation. In angles formed by bits of the wall left standing, tall weeds lifted their heads and aided in sheltering the quiet figures in waiting.

Behind the roofless outhouses, and in a thicket of low scrubby trees, at some distance from the road, the horses were hidden out of harm's way, and all the land about was as silent as the grave.

The country road ran parallel with the broken outline of the wall, at the foot of a

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

gentle slope some twenty yards away, and not a bush or tree intervened. On the other side of the road, toward the capital, stretched the low level plains, a wilderness now, which had once been a garden spot of greenery and repose.

The ruined *hacienda* of La Florida had been mentioned in the Colonel's order as the place of rendezvous, and Plácido Ruiz with his three companions had been sent to lead Tercera's detachment thither by the shortest route, rather than that Tercera himself should lose time by following the road, or endanger the project on hand by meeting the enemy with his small force, before the conjunction of the two bands.

The body of Spanish troops to be intercepted was expected to pass La Florida not later than eight o'clock in the morning, and now it was already seven and a half, and no Cuban colonel had arrived.

"We'll have to do without them," the plucky little captain said at last to his lieutenant, as they sat on a charred beam of the fallen roof inside of the house walls. "My men are already aching to pull their triggers, and I shall not say them nay, if the chance offers."

MACHETE

"But you'll not engage the enemy if they prove very numerous, my Captain?" the lieutenant asked gravely, with a quiet look through a rent in the house wall along the line of ambush.

"Certainly, we'll 'engage' so far as they will let themselves be engaged!" was the answer flashed back by Tercera. "The walls and the weeds out there might hide a hundred of our men, while the grove here, scorched and broken up as it is, could shelter another hundred easily. How is the enemy to know that we have but thirty men, including the numerous reinforcement of four sent us by Colonel R—? Are you afraid, Señor Lieutenant?"

"Am I afraid of that spider?" asked the young fellow simply, thrusting out the toe of his shoe and crushing a huge, black creature which had sprawled out of a deep fissure in the walls, to reconnoiter. Captain Tercera laughed and shrugged his shoulders, and then both men gave their attention to a map of roads, roughly sketched upon a bit of brown wrapping paper.

Meanwhile, Amada's slight figure, in the short skirt and loose boyish jacket, had crept

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

quietly across the dewy stretch of ground from the grove toward the outer boundaries of the plantation. The girl stopped once, and shading her eyes from the long, level rays of the sun, glanced along the line of ambuscade above the road. Then with an unwonted air of grave timidity upon her face, she stepped closer to a heap of adobes and stones at one side, and presently kneeled in its shadow, close at the heels of a crouching soldier. Before taking up their position the men had succeeded in strengthening their hiding places by heaping the scattered stones and other débris here and there along the line, so that they might shoot into the passing force of the enemy without danger of detection before the time for charging might arrive.

The man kneeling in front of Amada did not notice her light footfalls behind, but he stirred a little as she knelt behind him, making room for her at his side.

"There is room for you here, comrade," he said, without taking his eyes from the road below. "Ah! who are you?" he asked then in amazement, as Amada's skirt brushed against his arm, and the girl herself stooped

MACHETE

and peered from his outlook upon the road, through the bunch of weeds.

So he was not going to recognize her at all, even in the broad light of day, thought Amada, with some of her old pettishness, while she had known him at the first glance, even though his hair had grown long like a woman's! No, she would never tell him her name, if he would not take the trouble to look into her eyes. *Caramba!* she would make him look into her eyes, and then he would know without asking who she was and all she had suffered! Her glance fell upon a bunch of dusty blossoms of purple hue, growing among the other weeds, and a thought flashed across her mind.

"What have you done with my card of pansies, purple and gold?" she asked, with a quaver in her voice, but with a bold, bright glance around into the man's wondering face. "You said you would keep them for me!"

Plácido dropped the rifle in his hands and almost roughly grasped Amada's shoulders.

"You!" he cried. "You, at last! And my mother?" Plácido's words were always few, but the somber lines left his mouth for

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

an instant, and a light entered his eyes, and Amada knew that he was glad, even if he had not said so.

"She died. We buried her in the forest," Amada faltered under the gaze of those burning eyes, fixed upon her with their new expression of alertness.

"It was better so, cousin. She could never have endured ——"

"You will tell me all when — when this is over," he interrupted, glancing down into the road, and then eastward along its rough and rutted length. A dark moving mass appeared, a quarter of a mile away. "They are coming, Amadita," he whispered. "Have you arms — a pistol — anything?"

"I have your machete," she answered, proudly lifting her hand which grasped the heavy weapon. "And this," showing the old pistol slipped into a strip of leather bound about her waist.

The alarm had been given, and captain and men breathlessly awaited the approach of the body of soldiers moving toward them.

Once more Amada spoke, in a whisper heard only by Plácido:

"And my card? I burned the house, but

MACHETE

you had the card safe in your pocket, Plácido mio?"

"I tore it into a thousand atoms!" was the fierce retort. "Was I to 'love' the enemy who had burned my house and killed my women?"

"I burned the house, Plácido, and I am still with you," Amada whispered softly in his ear. "But neither do I love them, cousin!"

Then every man among them lifted his musket to his shoulder, or grasped his machete firmly, while the girl held a weapon in each hand, and peering into the road prayed the Son of Mary that she and Plácido and Cuba might now be avenged.

Half an hour later, the sun had entered a passing cloud, and the brilliant blue of the sky overhead had lost its sparkle in the shadow.

Within the same brief space, the Spanish force had approached the apparently deserted little homestead of La Florida, with unguarded carelessness, and lo! the troop was now making all haste back again toward the railway, but a few miles distant. It had been the hurried march of a small band of cavalry, detailed to accompany — not an ammunition train, but a number of sick Spanish soldiers from camp at a country town, to the railway,

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

en route for a Havana hospital. Having accomplished this errand, they were returning to camp when surprised by Tercera's ambuscade, but lost no time in wheeling about and retreating in some disorder back to the depot, whither Tercera had no notion of pursuing them. The surprise of the attack of the ambuscaded Cubans had been so sudden and disquieting that the Spaniards made but a feint of pausing in the road, even for the assistance of their wounded, and so when, after the first alarming volley of musketry had burst from behind stone and hedge, the patriots had rushed into sight under cover of their own smoke, the enemy had galloped off without more ado, soon distancing those on foot.

Captain Tercera sat on a loose stone in the yard of La Florida and grumbled heartily.

"We have only wasted our powder and cartridges for nothing," he said to the young lieutenant who stood near, counting the few charges left in his belt.

"There is one man lying dead in the road, my Captain," the young man replied gravely. "At least two others rode off reeling in their saddles."

MACHETE

"And not one of their bullets came within earshot of us!" a sharp-faced little *asistente* put in, as the captain failed to reply.

"Men surprised by an ambushade and firing over their shoulders are not to be expected to take good aim, youngster!" the quick-tempered captain retorted, turning upon the *asistente* and motioning him away. "Order that dead man put out of sight, Lieutenant," he added, in a quieter voice. "Then we'll have a cup of *guarapo*,¹ if there's any to be had!"

¹ *Guarapo*: Boiling water sweetened with sugar.

CHAPTER XIV

Nor trumpets summon him to war,
Nor drums disturb his morning sleep.

DRYDEN.

MOST of the men had already tramped off to the adjoining field, where the cane had again sprouted above the charred remains of last year's crop, and were busy with their machetes, securing a breakfast for the troop.

A few soldiers had betaken themselves to the thicket back of the house, where a negro *asistente*, in the capacity of cook, had kindled a fire. The excitement of the shooting still vibrated in their voices, as they gathered about the fire where the cook was heating water in an old pot, happily discovered on the premises.

"No *guarapo* this morning, comrades," the cook said sorrowfully, stirring the unsweetened boiling water patiently and uselessly, while the sweat ran in beads down his cheeks.

MACHETE

"If we had spent our cartridges on wild pigs instead of on that dead man lying in the gully, we would have fuller stomachs to-day!" one man presently muttered gloomily over his steaming pan.

"You are a *sin verguenza*,¹ if ever there was one!" spoke up Brígido, standing by. "When my boy is a man he will starve rather than waste one bullet on stuffing for his stomach while there is an enemy left in Cuba! And little Cuba Libre would have made you blush for shame, man, if you had said that to her!"

"God forbid that there should be 'an enemy left in Cuba' when your Chico is a man!" another ejaculated piously. "But where is little Cuba Libre?"

No one had seen the girl since she had crept across the sunlit open and dropped to her knees behind the broken wall, at Plácido's side, just before the enemy approached. But she had always proved so capable of taking care of herself that no alarm was felt at her absence from the soldiers' mess. Often she touched nothing of the scanty food served the men, pretending that she preferred find-

¹ Shameless one.

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

ing her own berries and roots in wood and field. So when Plácido Ruiz a little later appeared from among the horses tethered a few yards away, he found the men patiently munching the short lengths of sugarcane provided by those who had returned from foraging, but his little cousin was nowhere to be seen.

"Where is the girl who was with us?" Plácido asked Brígido, searching with anxious eyes among the hungry group for signs of Amada.

"No one has seen her since the firing stopped," the man answered. "But she is all right, friend. Little Cuba Libre can take care of herself."

"She was close at my side, one moment," Plácido went on, "and the next, she was gone. My men and I must be off again, but I must speak with Am —, with little Cuba Libre, as you call her, before I go."

Something in the man's look arrested the careless reply which was upon the other's lips, and Brígido rose from the stump where he sat and beckoned Plácido aside.

"Tell me what you would say to the girl," he urged, in a half-whisper. "I will tell

MACHETE

her without fail. She has no father, *po-bre-cita*,¹ and, in these days, girls need fathers and brothers, *amigo* !”²

“She has a father in Havana,” Plácido said, speaking hurriedly and with emphasis. “They say you have a child in camp, man. As you have the heart of a father, promise me to do what you can to take a father’s place to this girl until the war shall end. After I shall have returned to my Colonel, I shall see what can be done to get the child into safer quarters, if not into Havana itself, where I shall find her again. She is my cousin, friend ; you will watch over her, and tell her, when she comes, that — ?”

A summons from the captain called Plácido away, and Brígido had only time to whisper, as the stranger still lingered for an instant :

“Confide in me, *compañero*, and shall I tell her that you will come for her some day ?”

With a nod of hasty consent, Plácido strode away and with his three companions was seen no more by Tercera’s men.

A quarter of an hour later, he was riding away by a short cut, bound for a district

¹ Poor little thing.

² Friend.

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

become well known to him during the past year, by weary weeks of wandering, of marching, and of ambuscading. His heart was lighter than it had been for a year, but a weight still oppressed it with the realization that he had found Amada only to lose her again, after one brief look into the daring, dark eyes, and a few softly spoken words from the sweet, red lips.

The little face had grown more serious and more womanly now, he thought, for he had hardly noticed the cropped hair and the boyish jacket she had worn.

He had wished to tell her of the queer little companion of his first days of wandering — the white mouse which had escaped the flames only to curl up and die one day in the corner of his blouse pocket, — perhaps from homesickness, who could tell? And above all he had desired to hear more of the dear old mother. Of course, he had known she must be dead, how could it be otherwise? At least, he had now the comfort of knowing that her bones rested in peace, doubtless in some leafy recess of the forest, where the trees chanted a solemn requiem above her resting place.

MACHETE

By degrees, therefore, Plácido lifted his head from his breast, and content entered his heart, banishing the shadow. After all, he was alive and Amadita was alive and in no real peril while surrounded by the care of a woman and the devotion of a score of men. Surely, aid from the big liberty-loving outside world would come some day, and Cuba would be free. Then again he would find Amada, and, side by side, as they had sat on the palm log at home, they would again sit down together, and tell of the days that had separated them, one from the other. Perhaps it would be on the old stone bench in the hallway in Havana, the elderly cousin Helena sitting by with lips silenced for once, and eyes and ears opened to the wonderful tales told by the returned wanderers. Perhaps it would be in the doorway of some rustic *rancho* of the forest, or beneath the palm thatching of a peasant hut in the fields, when war should be over, and men be again turning their hands to planting and reaping.

Yes, Amada was alive, and though the carefully planned attack of that morning upon the enemy had ended as so many careful plans were ending every day, in a mere

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

skirmish and disappointment, yet Amada was alive, and her eyes were still as bright as stars, so the birds chirped merrily along the woodland trail, and even Plácido himself whistled pensively, once or twice, along the way. On leaving La Florida, he had followed the main road for perhaps twenty or thirty yards, before turning aside into the path leading back to the hills where his own officer's headquarters lay. If, on reaching this path, he had glanced over his shoulder and down into the overgrown brush of the gulley alongside the road, a strange sight would have met his eye and arrested the hand urging his horse onward. But he gave no backward glance.

Amada, among the weeds in the depths of the gulley, looked up and saw the dark head of a horse for an instant, and heard the thud of his hoofs in leaping the deep ditch for the path. She opened her mouth to cry for help, but her tongue refused to obey her will, while her throat went dry. Suppose it were Plácido riding off? What would he, the eager-eyed patriot soldier, say at finding her, little Cuba Libre, sitting there with the head of a dying Spanish soldier

MACHETE

resting on her lap? Suppose, instead, it were one of another party of the enemy advancing?

She had seen a soldier fall from his panic-stricken horse, down in the road, even as she had rushed out, machete in hand, behind the flying battalion and aflame with the ambition to try her steel for Cuba, if the fallen foe were not wounded already, and with the hot blood pounding at her temples, she had flown toward the spot where the lad had half-risen, only to see him drag himself, like a wounded bird, to the edge of the gulley, and tumble over out of sight.

"He wants to die like a dog in a ditch," she had murmured to herself, as she knelt to peer over after him. The firing had ceased, and only a film of smoke in one direction and a cloud of dust in the other gave witness to the events of the past few moments.

"Mercy!" the soldier had cried thickly, extending feeble arms toward the face peering down through the fringe of dusty bushes above his head.

The girl had not recognized her old play-fellow at the first look, but her woman's heart had softened at the sight of helpless-

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

ness, and she had slashed at the briars with Plácido's machete, opening a way for herself to follow to the bottom of the gulley. Then, dropping the machete, she had fallen on her knees beside the prostrate figure, and clasped her hands in silent compassion, forgetting that the gasping youth was a foe of her country and not yet recognizing Claudio Nuñez in his corporal's uniform. A light of recognition in his already dimming gray eyes, and her name spoken by his faltering lips brought light to her mind, and little Cuba Libre leaned low, and gently wiped the sweat with an edge of her skirt from the brow of an officer of his young Majesty's army of Spain!

"Claudio *mio*!" she cried; and then she had loosened the red and yellow sash of silk — colors of Spain! — from his slender waist, with all the deft care possible and bound it firmly across his chest, where a spreading stain of blood gave warning of the fatal wound, just as she had helped Juanita tend more than one wounded man in camp. And she lifted the fair, dust-covered head from the ground and rested it at ease on her lap, slipping to a seat on the ground. Amada knew that when the life-tide oozed from

MACHETE

wounds in chest and back there was little more one could do, on the spot, than to look sorrowfully into appealing eyes, and sometimes pass a gentle hand over the tumbled hair of the wounded.

And then it was that Plácido's horse had pounded past on heavy hoof as if over their very heads. The moment for calling out passed, and the sound died away. With a throbbing heart, Amada again turned her eyes downward upon the blanched face anxiously upturned.

"What is it?" the boy soldier asked, whispering between his panting breaths.

"Men riding by. They are gone now."

"And am I safe? They will not take me, Amada, to kill —?"

"No one shall touch you. But our men do not kill prisoners, Claudio!"¹

"You will stay — you will hold my head —"

"Yes, yes! Have I not always loved you, *pobrecito*?" Amada spoke in the tender tones of a mother soothing a suffering child.

"I did not mean to fight *you*, Amada," the boy faltered, after a little.

"But, Claudio, suppose I had shot you!"

¹ "The wounded are sacred." MAXIMO GÓMEZ.

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

Amada quavered, smoothing a wave of fair hair from the damp forehead. "I had no cartridge in the old pistol, and so it could not have been I who hurt you!"

Presently she started, with the quick thought that Juanita, back in the woods, might perhaps be able to save Claudio's life, if she herself could only get assistance from the men above, at the farmhouse. But the lad seemed to guess the meaning of the slight movement.

"Do not leave me, Amadita," he faltered again.

"Only to call some one to help us, Claudio."

"I do — not want — to die — alone," he whispered with quivering lip.

"I'll stay with you, dear. Nothing shall touch you. I shall never leave you!"

"Tell my mother —" he gasped, "tell her — I was *your* prisoner. Tell her — she will never know — else. Promise — Amada!"

"Yes, yes, Claudio. I promise on my heart. Now, rest awhile. Sleep, *mi corazón!*"

Obediently, he closed his eyes, but his breathing grew more labored, and the white eyelids fluttered open once more. "Amada!

MACHETE

I am — a — — Spaniard. My father — is dead — in Havana — I had to fight —”

“Yes, but never mind,” cooed the girl softly into his deafening ear. “I had to fight too, but we did not fight each other.”

She knew that the time had passed to think of seeking help for her dying playmate, if ever there had been hope of its availing. Silently, with the calm born of repressed emotion under many a strain, she smoothed his brow, while hot tears fell unheeded from her eyes upon Claudio’s face.

Once more the eyelids fluttered, a slight shiver stirred the blond head on Amada’s lap, and then all was still. For Claudio went to sleep, there, pillowed on little Cuba Libre’s knee, while a cloud slipped over the sun, and the birds chirped and rustled in the shade of the bushes close by. The little corporal was dead.

Amada kept her word given to Claudio and the soldier-lad was buried with dignity and even rough tenderness at evening of the day upon which he had fallen.

Amada told her tale to Captain Tercera himself, having presently left the body of

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

her young friend, to scramble out of the gully and skim lightly up the road and to the ruined house where the officer was speaking with an orderly. Tercera glanced keenly into the face of the young girl, flushed and tear-stained, and in a gentler tone than usually voiced his orders sent word to two of his men to follow little Cuba Libre and fetch the dead lad for burial.

At Amada's desire, the little corporal was brought up the gentle hill to the thicket near the house. Here the men dug a shallow grave, close by the scorched trunk of a gnarled *guásima* tree. But they left Claudio's body lying on the ground in the shade of the thicket for awhile, Amada sitting by in faithful watch until the time was nearly come for a return to camp. Broken planks from the floor of the house were used as lining for the grave, and when the body was gently laid to rest therein heavy stones were rolled into the cavity above the boards before the whole was heaped with the loose earth. Amada, still and tearless now, watched the burial, true to her promise to be near the boy to the end, and when all was done, she herself rolled a stone to the head of the grave to note the

MACHETE

place of burial. Upon the stone some one marked a cross with a bit of the charred wood.

"Some day his mother will come here," Amada thought to herself, but she did not speak her thoughts.

It was the best they could do, these poor patriots who were not in the habit of using much ceremony in the burial of even their own dead, yet little Cuba Libre's Spanish friend was handled even tenderly by these rough men, who were not proof against the pathos of the beauty and the youth of their victim, and a certain dignity was not wanting in the accomplishment of their task. There had been time enough and to spare for the simple burial, as the hot, bright day must end, and the darkness of night fall again, before Captain Tercera would lead his men back to the encampment in the woods.

"Little Cuba Libre might have helped herself to the little corporal's shoes and jacket, at least!" one soldier said to another, laughing slyly, as they turned from the grave and dropped on the ground for an hour of sleep.

"The *pobrecito's* things would have fitted none of the rest of us, it is true," the other

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

assented, "but the girl is not like us. The boy was hardly a Spaniard to her, I guess, for Brígido says she told him, as he brought the body up in his arms, that they played together, three years ago, on his father's plantation near Matanzas. *Ave María, vírgen de caridad!* when will this war end?"

PART FOURTH

HOPE

Oh yet we trust that somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill,
To pangs of nature, sins of will,
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood ;

That nothing walks with aimless feet ;
That not one life shall be destroyed,
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete ;

That not a worm is cloven in vain ;
That not a moth with vain desire
Is shrivelled in a fruitless fire,
Or but subserves another's gain.

In Memoriam. TENNYSON.



CHAPTER XV

How can I see the brave and young
Fall in the cloud of war, and fall unsung?

ADDISON.

VERY tiresome to impatient and courageous spirits was this endless skulking in byways and forests, but what else was there to do, when the patriot bands were poorly armed, if armed at all, and when the charges of ammunition never equaled in number even the scant supply of guns. Besides, the enemy was chary of open fight, and seldom cared to press an advantage gained in open road or field by following a retreating force into possible ambushade.

Such fruitless skirmishes as that which took place at La Florida were of frequent occurrence through the three western provinces, where Spanish authority was maintained in city and fort.

One day soon after Claudio's death and after some weeks of marching and foraging

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

by night and of returning to hiding places in wood and grass-grown field in the wee small hours, Captain Tercera's troop was detained for several days while out upon an expedition in which the *impedimenta* had not joined.

Juanita and Amada and the baby had had almost a merry time together, in the heart of the green wood, free from all fear of the enemy, and provided with food by the man left in charge of them and of the camp. Old Dionisio was a veteran private, very much cramped with the rheumatism, now and then, yet with his eagle vision still preserved and his skill in handling the machete unimpaired.

Toward nightfall of the day upon which the troop was expected to return to the old camping ground, Juanita and Amada crept together toward the highroad, running along the edge of the woods.

The woman bore Chico slung in an end of her shoulder scarf and she chirruped to him as she made her way through the overhanging vines and the prickly briars of the wilderness path, behind Amada.

"Be good, sweet Chico, thy father is coming," she crooned in the baby's ear, "and

HOPE

when the big horses come crashing over the tree trunks, and the brave men come home to rest, thy papá will swing thee in his strong —”

“Be quiet, Juanita!” Amada cried warningly. “We are too near the road for your singing. I am not sure that we ought not to have left the baby with Dionisio, after all. He squeals like a little wild pig!”

“And a little wild pig thou art, my Chico,” the mother cried, but softly now, and laying her thin brown cheek against the baby’s head. “Hark, girl!” she exclaimed suddenly in quite another tone. “Can it be our men I hear, and boldly abroad on the highway at so early an hour of the evening?”

Amada did not answer, but crept closer in the direction where the sky opposite the sun’s setting showed pearly blue through the thinning tree stems. The ground here was some feet above the level of the road, and now, for safety, Amada, with Juanita behind her, left the blind path leading downward to the road, and crouched beside a boulder to look over, her finger laid on her lip and her eyes staring with astonishment.

Juanita cuddled Chico close against her bosom and prayed the Virgin that the little

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

one might not squeal or cry, and then fixed her fascinated gaze upon the long lines of troops which had arrived at the point commanded by the boulder and were swiftly passing onward.

It was a larger body of Spanish troops than the women had ever seen mustered together, and the officers and men were well mounted, uniformed, and armed. They were some time in passing, although evidently in something of a hurry lest the shades of night should wrap them in its folds and expose them to they knew not what of discomfort and peril.

As the last horseman passed out of sight, Amada raised her face to Juanita's with an exclamation of relief.

"If they had seen us!" murmured the mother, clasping Chico so tightly that he squirmed and protested with eager brown fists.

"*Oyez!* there are others!" Amada whispered, as a sound of irregular hoof-beats smote upon their ears, and a second cloud of dust rose from the road a little in the rear of the vanishing troops.

Again the two women became as the rock against which they leaned, while six or eight horsemen rode into view below.

HOPE

The sun had not yet set, and there was still light below in the road, dusky as were the shadows creeping over the wood. The odor of cigar smoke rose from the riders below, and mingled with the heavy, sweet odors from vine and weed, and the only sound abroad was the noise of the horses' hoofs and of the voices of the passers-by.

But, just as the foremost rider came directly below the spot where Juanita and Amada stood with bated breath, Chico made a restive movement and uttered one shrill cry after another — sounds breaking strangely upon the evening quiet. Juanita smothered the poor baby's head in her scarf and pressed her lips tightly together, yet neither she nor Amada dared fly from the spot. Perhaps the soldiers would fancy little Chico's cry that of some animal of the forest.

"A child's cry, by the most Holy Cross!" an officer exclaimed, reining in his horse. "If children are close by, then women, and if women, men also, so fire, my men, right in among the trees!" he commanded, and a volley from seven or eight Mausers entered the wood.

Pah! Pah! Pah! Pah! murmured the balls as they flew past leaf and limb. Juanita,

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

slipped further into the shadows as noiseless as any wood creature trained to flight, clasp-
ing Chico close to her bared bosom.

Amada, forgetting all caution, started to spring after them, then she stood still for an instant, her faithful machete raised in her hand, and next, with one of her quick movements, she turned suddenly and half slid, half fell through the brush and briars, and landed amid a tangle of torn vines and dust in the road below, before the startled soldiers could fire again.

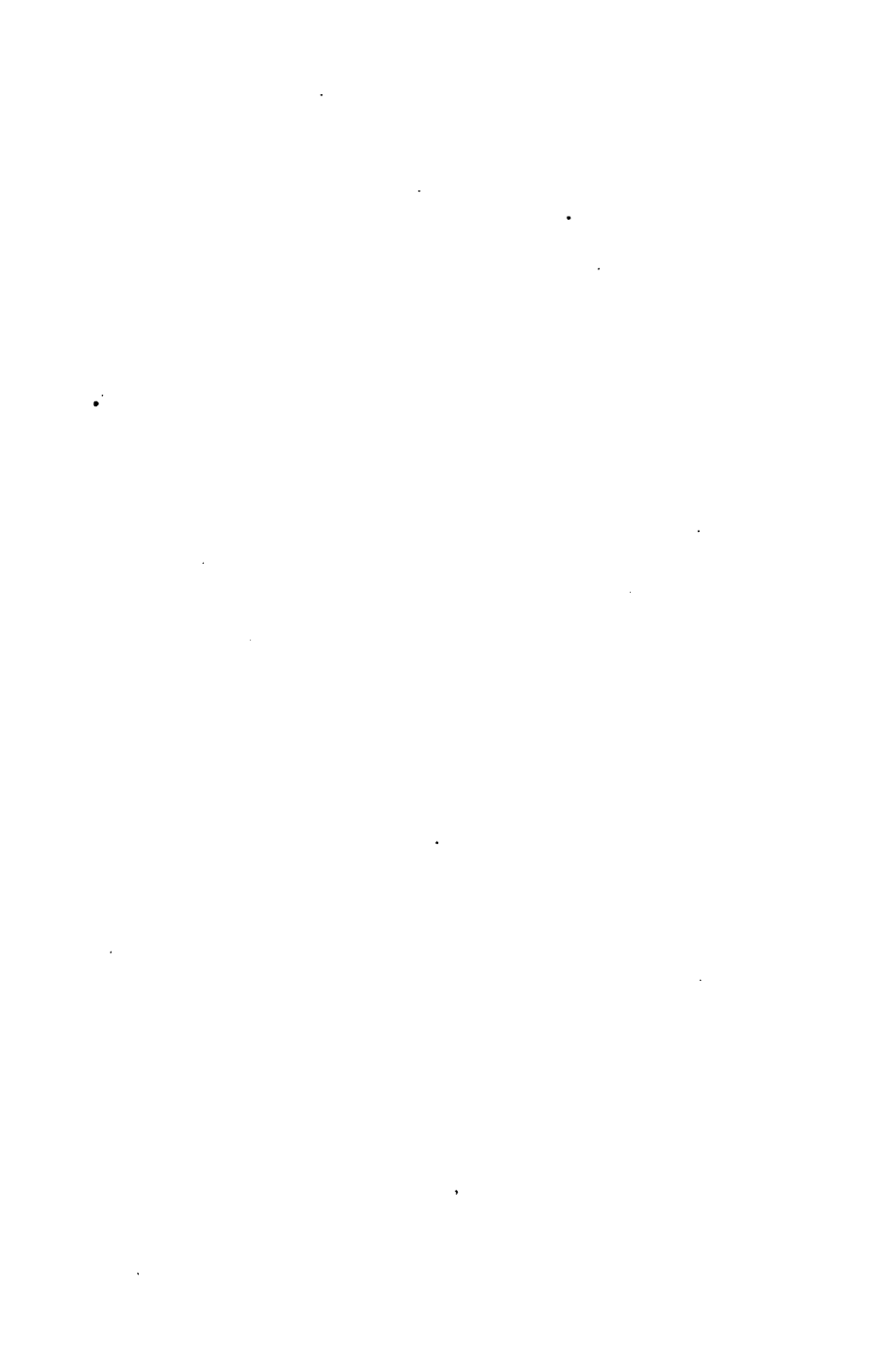
"You might have killed them both!" she screamed. "Cowards! to shoot at a baby upon a woman's breast!"

She was such a startling object, standing there at his horse's head, and flashing her great eyes upon him, that the officer who had given the order for firing was deprived of speech for the instant. But a turn of her arm showed the machete.

"Rope the little demon and sling her up behind you, Conrado," he called hastily to a man behind him, at the same time backing his horse away from little Cuba Libre, who still stood staring from one to the other of the group.



The officer who had given the order for firing was deprived of speech for the instant. *Page 236*



HOPE

Most unwillingly, the man addressed slipped from his horse and approached the girl with the machete. He held a pistol in his hand, and in thick tones threatened to fire, if the blade were so much as pointed at him. But little cared Amada for threats. Her hand did not shrink, and as the soldier attempted with his one free hand to disarm her, she slashed upward with Plácido's keen-edged machete, and "Conrado" dropped his pistol and wheeled around in the road, howling with pain, while the blood flowed from a deep cut in the forearm.

"No, do not shoot!" the officer shouted, as half a dozen rifles flashed into position. He spurred his horse forward and with a swift movement of his long sword struck the machete from Amada's trembling hand, and it fell into the dust of the road. A soldier leapt from his horse before the girl could think of stooping for the weapon, and little Cuba Libre's arms were hurriedly bound by a lasso which had hung over the pommel of the man's saddle.

"Swing her up on your horse then, Gutierrez," the officer called mockingly. "To you belongs the honor of conducting the pris-

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

oner, since your valor has prevailed over Conrado's. Now, *adelante!*"

And onward they went, with little Cuba Libre slung like a sheep over the neck of Gutierrez' horse. Not a word had she spoken, not an outcry had passed her lips, since she had stood with almost a smile upon her face as the man had roughly wound the rope about her, for had not Plácido's machete at last drawn blood for Cuba!

The man in the saddle behind her wondered over the self-control of this mere child, who neither struggled nor cried out as the horse jogged onward, while the blood surged in her ears, and every bone was racked with the roughness of the way.

The ride was mercifully short, and ended at one of the small railway stations on the road from the south to Havana. Here there was a small wooden fort, with temporary barracks for the soldiers, and here also, under the guns of the fort, a huddle of crazy palm tents, wretched shelters for the *reconcentrados* driven in from the countryside.

Amada saw nothing of this, however, as she was pulled from the horse by rough hands, and dropped, a half-conscious heap, near the railroad track.

HOPE

A body of infantry was about to be forwarded to the capital, and cars were already in waiting, — a long train of mixed freight and passenger coaches, guarded at each end by armored cars.¹ A trampling of feet and a babel of tongues accompanied the boarding of the train.

Some one, in passing, extended his foot, and briskly stirred the heap of dusty rags which still lay close beside the track.

“What is this? A rebel woman trying to escape?” the man asked, stooping over Amada, and shaking her shoulder with an ungentle hand.

“They have just brought her in from the country,” muttered a guard standing by. “Take her on to Havana with you.”

At the mention of Havana, Amada sat up, and looked wildly about her. Yes, there was the puffing train, and some one had spoken of Havana! Her eyes gleamed through the tangle of her short black locks, and she extended her arms imploringly toward the guard.

¹ Freight cars encased in sections of iron sheeting, pierced by openings for the muzzles of rifles, to be fired from within upon attacking forces.

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

"For the sake of Christ, take me to Havana," she prayed. "I have a mother there —"

"*Caramba!* but what is this?" cried a cavalry officer, striding up, with uplifted saber. "Back with the creature to the huts! How have you allowed one of those girls to force her way to the train?"

"You brought her yourself!" the guard muttered, turning on his heel and walking away, with shrugging shoulders.

The officer looked again, and bade another sentry approach with his lantern, for it was growing dark.

"Ha! the fierce little savage of the forest! She is no *pacífica*, but a prisoner of war!" he cried laughingly. "On to Havana and Morro Castle with her, my men. Yes, take her with you, I say, and hand her over to Colonel Chávis with my compliments." The officer then strutted off, his spurs jingling, and his harsh laugh still sounding, as he made a way for himself past the soldiers crowding into the train.

Presently the train steamed off, laden with soldiers, smoking, lolling, dozing, or talking together. Amada, having been hustled

HOPE

aboard by the officer's orders, crouched on the rumbling floor of a dark corner of a freight car, her chin resting upon her knees, which were drawn up close to her breast. No one noticed her, and the colonel's careless order seemed to be forgotten.

The car was lighted by one or two smoky oil lamps, and Amada found herself securely hidden behind a big soldier who sprawled over a box, and sang uproarious street songs of Madrid. The train lumbered on in the darkness across the open country, unchallenged by the dreaded Cuban outcry.

How strange it was to be again on a railway train, and without Plácido! Amada thought, her brain clearing. Where now were Juanita and Chico — dear, beautiful Chico? Would old Dionisio, having heard the firing, venture into the wood to search for them, before the return of the tired soldiers?

Would the men miss little Cuba Libre from their midst?

Would Plácido ever find her again, now that she was a prisoner of war, and about to be shut up in that terrible Morro Castle, on the beautiful blue harbor of her own Havana?

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

While Amada's brain was busy with these bootless questionings, her hands had been no less busy, though furtively. Even to the end of the short railway journey she still seemed forgotten, concealed by the big soldier lolling near her corner. By constant working of first her arms and elbows and then her wrists and hands, she had succeeded in so loosening the hastily tied rope binding her, that, but for the sake of still appearing bound, she might have freed herself entirely. Perhaps, in the confusion of reaching Havana, she might manage to slip off unperceived in the darkness, and hide in some friendly doorway or gloomy street angle.

The train moved slowly and cautiously onward, although there was little danger of destruction to the track in such close proximity to the capital. With a rattle and jerk felt roughly from one end of the freight train to the other, the journey ended at last, and Amada was at home again. At home! and in the midst of hundreds of trampling, swearing, drowsy, uproarious soldiers, swarming out of the cars, and marshaling into line over the railroad tracks!

It was a night of utter darkness; except

HOPE

for the stars which seemed very, very far away above her bare head, as Amada peered out into the blackness, behind the last soldier. There were, of course, flaring lights here and there, and guards walking up and down with lanterns swinging in their hands, but these lights seemed only to put out the friendly stars and to make the shadows deeper.

CHAPTER XVI

The poor alone are outcasts; they who risked
All they possessed for liberty, and lost;
And wander through the world without a friend,
Sick, comfortless, distressed, unknown, uncared for.

LONGFELLOW.

“**T**HEY have forgotten me!” Amada gasped, from the dim emptiness of the car, and scarcely daring to breathe. If that nearest guard would only go farther away —

Now was her time, as a second man joined the guard, and both stooped to peer beneath the next car in the line. Their backs were turned to her for the moment, and Amada dropped noiselessly to the ground from the opening in the side of the car, and sped, like a pursued kitten, to the shadow of a heap of rubbish and stones, a few yards away. Pressing her slim body, clad in its dark frock and jacket, flat upon the rough heap of building materials, Amada awaited an opportunity

HOPE

for another move. The two men stood upright and approached the car from which she had just taken flight.

"*Caramba!* the rope! Here it lies on the floor, and the little machete slasher has escaped!" exclaimed one of the men, looking inside. He wore the uniform of a petty officer, and was evidently disturbed. "Had she wings, or were your eyes blind that you did not see —?"

"See what?" asked the guard crossly.

"A ragged girl, a fierce little rebel, whom our train brought in along with the soldiers."

"A girl? A prisoner? And escaped from your care? Then the less you say about the matter, the better for you, my friend," the guard said carelessly, as for a moment longer they made a pretence of searching in and about the car.

Finally they moved onward, passing so close to Amada that she held her breath, almost fainting in despair, and dared not move, although her sandaled feet stretched near their path. Happily, the guard's lantern swung with its blind side toward her, its searching rays piercing the shadows lying about the cars on the other side, and after

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

two dreadful minutes passed, Amada dared to lift her head from the suffocating dust and mortar, and glance stealthily about her.

The soldiers were in the act of marching away toward the barracks, which were at some distance from the station, and shrewdly divining that the attention of the few persons about would naturally be occupied with them, Amada stole from her dust heap and, skirting the friendly inclosure about the tracks, slipped safely away into an alley leading between rows of poor and unlighted houses.

Not yet did she feel safe, and the spitting and hissing of two cats, glaring at each other from heaps of garbage in the way, so startled her that she only saved herself from screaming aloud by clapping a shaking hand upon her mouth.

There were no lights in the alley, but farther on she could see the gleam of an electric globe high in the air. Never before had she been in this dark and lonely by-street, for on the only other occasion when she had visited a railway station it had been to take the train for Matanzas, quite on the other side of the city, across the arm of blue water.

HOPE

Yet, was it not Havana, and would not the night soon pass and the sunshine come again, when she would be able to find the yellow house, where — But no, the present darkness was more friendly to an escaping prisoner than any beam of sunlight could be. Onward, therefore, wearied and almost sinking in her steps, she crept, until one narrow street after another finally led her faltering feet into a broad, paved highway. Here her limbs failed her, and she sank, dazed and quivering, within an archway opening by iron gates into some villa garden. There were few pedestrians abroad at this late hour, and so far from the heart of the gay city, but now and then a carriage rolled heavily by over the stones.

As Amada rested, she looked quietly about, although her heart still beat fast. Ah! now she recognized the Calzada del Cerro! How far away then she was from home, much nearer, even, to the Señora Deuda's villa!

She must have slept a good deal after that, for when, with a startled awakening to consciousness, she again lifted her head from her breast, and moved her stiffened limbs, the winking stars had shut their eyes;

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

the electric sparks burning far down the Calzada, toward the city, had all been extinguished, and the hush of dawn brooded over the avenue and the orchard trees overlapping the high walls.

Amada was still light-headed, and a deadly faintness seized her as she struggled to her feet. For a moment, she had to steady herself against the cold stone wall and breathe heavily, before she could urge her feet onward. But she still retained enough consciousness to be sure that daylight must not find her asleep, or dying in the gateway. How could the little exile returning to her home know of the city streets and alleys teeming with homeless ones like herself, with sickly children and feeble women, thankful for the shelter of a gateway or ruined wall?

Without heeding the direction they took, she allowed her listless feet to bear her farther away from the city, and past the garden walls of wealthy landowners, asleep in their beds after late hours of pleasure seeking.

The girl roused once to look about her, as she stumbled onward, and lo! the sky before her was of a clear rose color, while the broad, ragged leaves of a clump of banana

HOPE

trees waving above an orchard wall close by were touched with the gold of the east!

Amada smiled, and grew content. Here at last was the lovely morning breaking over Havana! Far away to the eastward the blue wavelets of the harbor would be rippling under the golden sky at the very foot of grim old Morro! But she was free, and right in front of her were the familiar gateposts of the Señora's villa!

It seemed a natural thing to thrust her hand inside the grating of the little wicket, at the side of the wide entranceway, and lift the chain thrown carelessly over a hook. Many a time she had come thus, while the day was yet young and fair, but never at quite so early an hour.

Was this the little child who had never needed urging to the errand of carrying her mother's finished sewing to fat Doña Isabel, who had flitted, joyous as any butterfly, past the gray trunks of the royal palm trees, on into the oleander thicket behind the white house, — this hollow-eyed, heavy-footed girl, whose long, lean arms hung wearily at her side, whose ragged skirt flapped about her scarred and road-stained ankles?

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

The avenue ended, and the white columns of the verandah came in sight. The honeysuckle vine still threw its protecting shade about a certain window, — if she could only reach that window, and drop down to rest among the weeds and grass, at the foot of the *madreselva*¹ vine!

“Thou God of mercy, for the sake of thine own Son, give back to me my boy, my beautiful Claudio! *Ave María purísima!* hear a mother’s cry!”

The sun had risen, and the casement above Amada’s head had been gently opened from within. The prayer uttered aloud, in the loneliness of the sunrise hour, smote upon Amada’s ears, and aroused her, exhausted as she was, to a yearning after more words in those well-known tones. But no words more came from behind the thin muslin curtains, only a suppressed sobbing stirred the silence, as if an unseen woman within were afraid of disturbing some sleeper close by.

“La Señora Nuñez!” Amada murmured dreamily, not lifting her head from the ground, and only half unclosing her eyes. “Dear

¹ Honeysuckle.

HOPE

Señora! I will take you to Claudio. Come with me to La Florida—I promised—Claudio—to tell—his mother—” then silence.

A small white hand had pushed aside the curtains, and the Señora Nuñez gazed wonderingly down upon the dark, crumpled heap on the ground beneath the window. Some poor, starved, perhaps fever-smitten wanderer from the city had found her way to the house, and possibly had been lying there all night, dying, under her very window! What was the wretched creature muttering, over and over again? The lady leaned farther out of the window, until Amada’s dulled eyes unclosed again, and fixed themselves upon the sweet, familiar face above her. With a great effort the girl roused herself to stammer a few intelligible words:

“Señora—I promised . Claudio—we buried him—he said, ‘tell my mother’—,” and then Amada relapsed into a state of deeper insensibility.

Many days passed before she next opened her eyes. She lay on a little iron bed, covered by a sheet of speckless white linen. An empty chair stood beside the bed and, at a short distance, a table covered with a white

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

cloth. On the cloth were ranged cups and bottles in orderly rows.

A brief lifting of the long-lashed eyelids sufficed to show this much, and there was no one by to count the minutes before the dark eyes again opened with a wandering glance about her.

And now a short, stout figure clothed in white cotton squatted in a queer heap on the brick floor near the chair, and a pair of watchful eyes gleamed in the midst of the broad black face above the hunched shoulders. As Amada's listless glance fell upon the silent watcher, he scrambled to his feet and waddled noiselessly but as swiftly as his bowed legs could bear him across the floor and out of the door, which closed behind him. Amada knit her brows, and tried to recall where she had ever before seen the misshapen creature, but in vain.

Many times after that first day of partial return to consciousness, she waked to find the same bright eyes intent upon her face and to see, as through a mist, the stunted but agile figure promptly disappear through the doorway as soon as her eyes fell upon it.

As in a dream, she had often seen faces

HOPE

as of angels bending over her, and had felt the touch of gentle hands, and had heard the sound of voices which were not all strange, while she had lain between those clean white sheets, yet not once had the queer watcher on the bricks spoken a word, nor had he ever approached her bed.

One day, she waked fully from sleep and found the white-clad boy squatting as usual in his place. But this time the big kinky head was nodding upon his breast, and the long, lean hands were clasped serenely over his round stomach. As Amada with a kind of fascination watched the great head drop and recover itself by turns, the door behind the boy opened, and a second white-clad figure entered ; but how different !

If one of the tall white lilies with the gold-tipped stamens, such as had bloomed in her father's flower beds, had taken upon itself human form, Amada would not have wondered if it had presented itself in some such shape as this white-and-gold maiden who was now entering the chamber.

"Violeta !" gasped the sick girl ; at least she thought she called the pretty name, but no sound really left her parched lips.

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

"Lazy little dog!" the dainty creature cried, in an indignant whisper, at the same time touching the dwarf in no gentle way with the toe of her bronze slipper. Then she stooped and shook him roughly by the shoulders.

The "lazy little dog" roused with a snarl, and darted on all fours directly under the high bed where Amada lay. That sudden creeping movement of the dwarfed boy recalled to Amada the yellow-frocked pet of Doña Isabel! And there she had lain, day after day, with those great sparkling eyes fastened upon her, and had not once been afraid!

"Then you are awake at last," Violeta was saying to her. "Really awake this time, and that little black idiot asleep on the floor! Many a time he has come running out of your room to call mamá or Doña Isabel, and we have come hurrying in only to find you sound asleep again, or 'unconscious', as the doctor says. A poor watchdog he is!"

Cristóbal Colon set to watch her, as a nurse watches a sleeping child! How strange! and the boy was faithful, whatever Violeta

HOPE

might say. What was she saying now, in her high, wearying voice.

"Now you will tell us all about poor Claudio? Did you see him die, Amada? Yes, of course, we knew you, after Doña Isabel had washed your face, even though you are so ugly with your hair all gone — There! she's asleep again, or faint! Cristóbal, run for mamá! I thought you had gone, you simpleton." And with another thrust of her dainty foot, she pushed away the negro boy who was crawling from his hiding place.

However, when Cristóbal saw that Amada's eyes were closed, and his deaf ears hearing not a word of Violeta's command, he dropped upon the floor again in his former position, and gave no further heed to the girl's menaces.

Another day and night passed before Amada became again fully conscious and opened her eyes upon objects around her. This time she found Claudio's mother in the chair at her side, and there was strength in her throat for a few murmured words. After that day the sick girl strengthened rapidly, and, little by little, she heard how she had been borne in from the garden more dead than

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

alive, and laid on a cot in an outhouse, until a physician had pronounced her weakness simple exhaustion unto death, caused by no fever or disease of any kind. But it had not been "unto death", for the quiet of the little room next Doña Isabel's, into which she had been presently moved at the orders of the lady of the house, the young Señora Deuda, and the nourishing food provided, with the careful nursing of the Señora's fat housekeeper, had done their part in assisting time to heal the ravages of grief and want and exposure.

"My father and my mother?" had been Amada's first conscious question, even before she had grown strong enough to report to the yearning mother the story of Claudio's death in her arms. Later, she had described as clearly as she was able, in her feeble murmurs, the locality in which her parents had lived, and the Señora Nuñez herself had that very day begged to be driven to the neighborhood, with Cristóbal Colon perched in his place on the boot beside the driver.

They had returned, however, unaccompanied by the eager, hurrying Cuban mother, expected by Amada, and the boy's expressive

HOPE

gestures had informed Doña Isabel as plainly as speech could have done, not only that he had understood their errand, but also that the yellow house was occupied by strangers, and that the sick girl's family had gone, no one knew whither.

This was crushing news, and for a while the gentle Spanish lady, guest of the house, feared that the Cuban girl would never rally from her disappointment enough to talk of Claudio. But little Cuba Libre had not suffered the bitter lessons of disappointment and renunciation in vain, and when the first physical weakness resulting from the shock had passed, she bravely turned her face to the light, and kissed the Señora's hand.

When her pitiful story of Claudio's death had been told his mother, and the tears of the Señora Nuñez had dropped freely on the little cropped head resting on the pillow, the lady vowed in her heart that she would never be separated from the playmate of her dead boy, so long as none of the girl's family should arise to claim her for their own. Together, they would seek the *guásima* tree at La Florida, some day when the dreadful war should be over, and Cuba subdued or free.

CHAPTER XVII

I cannot but remember such things were,
That were most precious to me.

SHAKESPEARE.

AT the end of a week from the time of her last rousing to perfect consciousness, Amada was declared strong enough to sit in a chair at the latticed window overlooking the orange-tree arbor. Doña Isabel still dispensed orders each day, from her big rustic chair outside, but always there was a brief word of encouragement for the sick girl, and perhaps a heavy pat from the large dimpled hand on Amada's shrinking shoulder, as the housekeeper passed through the small room next her own, to take possession of her throne. But she had not yet seen her first Señora, the young widow of Deuda.

The middle of February was at hand, and the weather was dry and hot in Havana. The Spaniards in the great city felt secure in its fortifications against any insurgent

HOPE

attack from within the Island, but not quite so secure from outside foes. Old Morro Castle frowned upon the world from the right bank of the harbor's mouth, and the Castle of La Punta from the left. Spanish war-ships, with an occasional visitor of other nationalities, rode the waters of the harbor, while the fortifications along the coast bristled with guns.

Inside the city, life went merrily,—in the promenades and about the *plaza de armas*, thronged with gay officers of the Spanish army by day and night, while bull fight, theater, and ball were attended as of old by youth and beauty and wealth.

Safe in her pleasant refuge behind the royal palms, Amada knew nothing of the misery of the gay city beyond the villa gates. By and by, when she should be strong enough to walk, she would leave the house of the Señora Deuda, notwithstanding any contrary commands of that lady herself, and of her guest and friend the Señora Nuñez, and her feet would never rest again until she should find some trace of her father and the others of her family. Was she, who for weary, weary months had known no roof save the

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

good God's blue heavens, or the star-pierced thatching of a *rancho*, to shrink from treading alone the streets of her own native city, by day or night? Not one alley would she leave unexplored. Surely from some poor doorway, or inner court, she would at last hear the cooing sound of Herculano's baby voice!

Amada was in her chair at the window, and the hot February afternoon was drawing to a close. Her mind had been going over and over the plans with which it had teemed during the past few days, and now she laughed aloud, but softly to herself, as she realized that Herculano could no more be the baby he was when she had last seen him than was she herself the carefree twelve-year-old child of four years ago!

"All alone and laughing to yourself!" cried a gay voice behind Amada's chair, and then a fragrance of violets filled the air about her, and Amada felt suddenly faint.

"Ah! you are not fond of me, as you are of the Señora Nuñez, naughty girl!" the voice continued. A sheen of satin and a sparkle of gems flashed before Amada's eyes, and the love-lady of her childish dreams stood before her. "They would not let me come

HOPE

to see you while you were ill, little one, though I quite longed to have you tell me stories of all your adventures among those dreadful soldiers in the woods. What is the matter, child?"

Amada was gasping for breath, and her head had sunk back upon the cushion of the wooden chair.

"Move her chair a little nearer the window, Pancho. There, you are better now, while I fan you, poor little one! But are you not happy, safe in my house? Does Isabel give you all you want?"

"Don't ask the child so many questions, Lola," a deep voice chimed in, to the accompaniment of a sword's rattle, and a manly tread upon the bricks of the floor.

Amada turned her dark eyes from the charming figure of the Señora only to rest them upon a glitter of brass buttons and gold orders shining upon the coat of the Spanish officer now standing at the lady's side.

"Our little prisoner seems dazed by your magnificence," the officer went on lightly.

Amada outstretched her poor thin arms appealingly toward the man, who stood

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

looking down upon her, a mocking smile curving his full lips.

"I am not your prisoner, señor?" she murmured faintly.

"No, you are only a dear little rebel, who has laid down her arms in submission to our precious young king over the ocean," the officer retorted, twisting the long ends of his mustache, and still smiling teasingly.

"Go away, Pancho," cried the little lady, stamping her foot impatiently! "He is a naughty man, Amada, but you must love him, if you love me, for he is my promised husband, and a brave, brave soldier!"

The officer's laugh rang out loudly as he overheard this remark, though he had obediently turned to leave the room. Then the door slammed, and he was gone.

"Your husband is dead, señora," Amada said, lifting her solemn eyes to meet the dancing ones of the pretty woman at her side.

"Ah! but this is Pancho, and I am to marry him very soon. Cannot a woman have another husband, when her first has been lying in the Campo Santo for five long years, silly girl?" Then her tone changed, "Poor little one, they tell me you have suffered,

HOPE

as I cannot even imagine suffering, you a mere child, and I a woman of twenty-four years! Never mind, your troubles are over now, if you will stay here with Isabel. She will take care of you, and by and by, you too will marry, and I will give you a marriage portion as if you were old Isabel's own daughter's child. So, those sad eyes must grow bright again, or I can never call you Tiger Lily, as Violeta swears I did, long years ago. And you must love me still, as they say you loved me, all those years ago when you used to come with the sewing for Isabel. *Adios*, little one, my Pancho is waiting, for we go into the city to dine at the palace to-night. Only hear how he strides up and down in the hall! There! take the violets; I wear others under my lace!"

The lovely lady was gone, with her satin gown and emerald necklace, her laughing eyes and ringing voice, but the scent of her violets filled the little room, which was growing dim with the dusk of evening.

Passionately Amada pressed the bunch of purple violets against her thin brown cheek, then she quietly laid them aside on the narrow window sill.

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

She was still excited by the visit, and her thoughts were in a turmoil of recollection and amaze. Memories trooped through her mind, crowding upon each other till her brain reeled, and the beating of her blood surged in her ears — the cream-colored ponies trotting past the mango tree; the posy of violets dropped in the road; the scent of the dusty blossoms, as they had lain against her warm bosom; the sheen of the golden moon as Plácido sat on the palm log at her side, and talked of loving one's enemies; the prick of the pin as she had plucked the withered violets from the bosom of her chemise, vowing that never more would she love Spanish man or woman; the shade of the cactus hedge where she had played with the Spanish children, telling fairy-tales of the lovely lady, whose emerald necklace had gleamed in the rays of the morning sun, when she stooped toward the Spanish officer from the verandah of her villa, as the *cucullos* flash their green fire among the gray palm trunks at eventide!

A slight scuffling sound outside of the window turned her attention from these memories. The window, unlike all the others of the house, was near the ground, and the

HOPE

casements being opened, Amada could see outside objects without stirring from her seat. It was only Cristóbal Colon, who had come close to the low sill, and was now craning his neck to peer over into the room — only the little black dwarf, whose white teeth shone in a friendly grin, as he gazed up into Amada's languid face.

She had lost all fear of the uncanny boy since the Señora Nuñez had related to her an incident of the first days of her illness. She had been lying for hours one day in a half-conscious state, when Cristóbal had come to her bedside on some errand for Doña Isabel. The boy had stood close beside the bed, his big eyes staring at the apparently sleeping face on the white pillow. Doña Isabel had put forth her hand to push him away, not being sure that some mischievous propensity might not prompt his nervous fingers to one of their sudden pinchings upon the helpless hand lying too temptingly near. Cristóbal, holding his ground, had demurred with low inarticulate cries, whereupon Amada, without unclosing her eyes, had lifted her hand and laying it upon the boy's head, had patted it softly again and again, murmuring

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

soothing words, as if to a frightened baby. The deaf boy, of course, had not heard the words, but the thin hand had interfered in his behalf, and had softly patted his head! From that day he had become Doña Isabel's trusty aide in the sick room.

"I wonder if he remembers when I used to come here with the sewing," Amada thought, as she nodded and smiled at the dwarf, over the window sill. This recognition of his presence seemed to be all the little deaf-mute had desired, for now he dropped to the ground, and sitting there with his legs, as usual, bowed beneath him, he contentedly hummed a tuneless air of his own composition.

"How afraid I was of him when he was so little and always dressed in a yellow frock," Amada continued thinking, diverted from her sadder reminiscences by the harsh sounds from the ground outside. "Perhaps I am kinder to him now, and for that reason he comes every day to the window, and smiles with his great mouth. He hates Violeta, Doña Isabel says, because she slaps him, and makes faces at him. I believe he remembers me a little too, for he often looks very wise and makes strange signs which Doña

HOPE

Isabel says mean that once I was little, and my hair beautiful and long, like the hair of other Cuban girls. Never mind, I was a soldier for Cuba, and Juanita had to cut it off in the woods where I could never comb it, and the thorns tore it out by handfuls! It will grow again perhaps, before Plácido comes!"

Cristóbal Colon's mysterious antics, and his troublesome absences from home, during the day of Amada's continued convalescence, became a source of sore trial to Doña Isabel. If the stout lady had been able to move about with a rapidity equal to his own, she might easily have put a stop to his roving. But how was one to have the heart to clap the boy into a locked room, while he sat quietly at her feet drawing figures in the sand with a pointed stick, or engaged in some other innocent amusement? Yet, just as surely as she would open her eyes from a moment's doze in her arbor chair, so surely would Cristóbal have disappeared from sight, gone nobody knew whither. None ever saw him go, and none ever saw him return, yet return he always did, perhaps rather soiled as to his white cotton garments, and as shining

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

wet with perspiration as a young seal is dripping after a plunge into the sea. To all signs of inquiry, and all threats of punishment, however, Cristóbal returned no reply save mysterious nods and shakes of the head, clumsy somersaults over the ground, or ridiculous attitudes of mock prayer for forgiveness.

Doña Isabel had made up her mind that these sudden disappearances must cease, when, without her threatened intervention they came to an end with the events of the week following the first visit of the lady of the house to Amada's room. For on that day Cristóbal accomplished the object of his runaway expeditions, and became again the devoted attendant of his patroness, Doña Isabel.

CHAPTER XVIII

Hope's precious pearl in sorrow's cup
Unmelted at the bottom lay,
To shine again when, all drunk up,
The bitterness should pass away.
MOORE'S "Loves of the Angels."

IT was a breathlessly hot morning, and Amada had walked alone out into the garden, to the shade of a huge clump of plantains, growing near a stone seat. A quiet as of the woods filled the villa grounds, where no one stirred among the flowers or strolled under the slight shade of the palms.

Long ago the morning housework had been finished, and the negro servants had betaken themselves to other duties in garden and laundry. The ladies were hidden within the cool recesses of their own rooms.

The young officer had not been seen at the villa on the Calzada, since the past night, when at a strangely early hour he had brought home his betrothed wife from the dinner-party,

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

and then, with fast beating heart, had hastened on galloping horseback to the city. For, during the early hours of that February evening, an awful tragedy had taken place on the placid bosom of the waters of Havana harbor. The great white battleship *Maine*, of the United States, a peaceful visitor in Cuban waters, had been suddenly destroyed by — who could tell, whether by accident from within or by design of the enemies of Cuba's freedom?

The riven hulk now lay submerged in the harbor — sepulcher of two hundred and sixty brave men who had shared the fate of the vessel.

While Havana that February day gasped awestruck in the midst of her business and pleasures, her poverty and her wealth, little Cuba Libre sat lonely on the stone bench under the plantains, and wished for even Cristóbal Colon to come and beam with friendly eyes upon her.

And he came, though not alone!

The bench upon which Amada sat thinking of home and of Plácido commanded a view of the wide driveway leading from the gates to the house. The girl's large eyes were fixed

HOPE

upon the ground at her feet, and her hands were folded listlessly on her lap. There was no breeze to stir the short, glossy locks of hair curling on her neck, and even touching her cheeks, as her head bent forward upon her breast. The loosely-fitting frock of white cotton, made by the Señora Deuda's own sewing-woman, with its ruffles at neck and wrist, hid the pitiful lack of roundness in the girlish figure, and plain slippers and stockings clothed the wayworn feet, resting at last from their wanderings. Home-sickness swelled the loyal little heart almost to bursting, and they were heavy eyes which presently were raised from the ground and fixed upon two figures coming up the avenue toward her. There had been no sound of any approach to startle her from her reverie, no clang of closing gate, no hailing voice, yet she lifted her eyes and looked, and then wondered if she were dreaming, by day, an oft-recurring vision of the night, when one or another of her lost ones appeared before her with beckoning finger.

Cristóbal Colon, squat and uncouth as usual, trotted briskly, now behind, now before, now alongside of a poorly clad woman whom he appeared to be driving and coaxing by turns to-

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

ward the house. He snapped his long fingers, chirruped with his tongue, grinned, frowned, gesticulated, and the woman walked stolidly onward, a look of patient endurance on her heavy face. When Cristóbal caught sight of Amada sitting erect enough now on her bench, he uttered a harsh cry of satisfaction, and skipping on ahead of the woman, reached the stone bench as Amada started to her feet. Planting his great hands on the seat, the boy vaulted over it among the plantain stems, and there stood with legs wide apart, and hands in the pockets of his trousers, his goggle eyes roving delightedly from Amada to the woman.

"Micaela!" Amada faltered, still staring.

The young woman stood motionless for an instant, and then the dull face glowed and broke into a rarely sweet smile. She took one step nearer, opened her arms to the slim white figure swaying before her, and clasped it in a vehement embrace.

"Oo-go-roo! Lul-la-yi-i!" yelled the dwarf, again vaulting over the bench, and rolling on the ground in an ecstasy, regardless of Doña Isabel's wrath to come.

"Amadita! Amadita! Where have you been all this time? Micaela thought you

HOPE

were dead. Poor Micaela! Pretty little Amadita!" sobbed the woman, alternately hugging Amada passionately to her heart, and holding her at arm's length for hungry inspection, yet with a grip which would not be loosened.

"My papá, Micaelita, and the baby — Oh, take me to them!" Amada herself sobbed, with her arms about the loving, dull-witted creature.

"Dead, Amadita! The baby is dead; happy Herculano in the Campo Santo! Don't cry, darling. Micaela will take you to Helena and Pablo and the little sisters. Come, now!"

But Cristóbal Colon had no mind that his share in the accomplishment of his feat should so soon end, and shrewdly guessing at the meaning of Micaela's gestures, he was on his feet in a moment, standing threateningly in the way.

"The ugly boy!" Micaela whispered shrinkingly. "He pulled my skirt in the street, and pinched my arms, and would not let me go home —"

"But he brought you to me, Micaela. He remembered the times you came with me for

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

the sewing when I was very small. Let us pass, Cristóbal, good Cristóbal!" Amada pleaded. "Do you not know she will take me to my mother?"

But the dwarf danced frantically around them, stopping his useless ears with his fingers as he had seen Violeta do, when he had startled her with his shrieks. As the two girls stood in impatient perplexity, not a little in awe of his violent gesticulations, Cristóbal suddenly sobered, and plucking Amada's skirt, beckoned her with coaxing finger toward the house.

There was nothing to be done but follow their vehement little guide, although Amada would willingly have deferred an explanation with the Señora and Doña Isabel, until she should have found her father, and returned with their grateful thanks to her protectors.

"Suppose they do not permit me to go with Micaela," the child thought innocently, as they awaited the return of Cristóbal who had left them with his mistress in the arbor, to summon the Señora Nuñez, who had from the first made herself Amada's special protectress at the villa.

But she need not have dreaded this unrea-

HOPE

sonable obstacle to immediate happiness, as she soon discovered, when even Doña Isabel's fat face softened at the sight of Amada's tremulous joy.

"Go home to your mother, child," Claudio's mother counselled without delay. "But come back to us to-morrow, if you can, Amada, and let me hear all about it. Remember, Amadita, that we have a journey to take together, some day. I know you will not forget poor Claudio and me, you faithful little soul!"

Then Micaela joyously led Amada away, followed by the jealously watching gaze of the negro boy. Doña Isabel, wedged into her garden chair, pulled him to her side, and pushed back the wide-brimmed palm hat covering his head.

"Little dog!" she exclaimed caressingly. "You tracked the rebel child's people to their den, did you? But, see, Señora, the imp is about to weep. A tear rolls down his cheek!"

"Poor little Cristóbal Colon!" murmured the gentle lady as she stopped to pat the big head of the strange creature, before reëntering the house. "Amada forgot to say *Adios*, perhaps. Never mind, she will come to us again to-morrow, little Cristóbal Colon."

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

But many to-morrows passed before Amada could be spared from the wretched hovel to which Micaela brought her along the hot Calzada, and through the reeking byways of the city.

Yet, a day came, by and by, when with Consuelo and Ana at her side, she again visited the villa to recount to the Spanish lady the sufferings of her family, for their fidelity to Cuba.

Little by little, the Señora Nuñez heard how the father had lost his place in the garden, soon after the war began, for "impertinence" offered the servants of Ramirez, the Judge, and reported to the absent owner. It had been easy to say "My flowers do not bloom for a Spaniard and his drudges. They grow in Cuban soil and for Cuban eyes!" But it had been less easy to feed six hungry mouths when another gardener worked among the geraniums and lilies and tuberoses, and the breadwinner had had to take his melancholy place among other dull-eyed loungers in the streets.

The sympathetic listener also learned how Helena and the stupid Micaela had furnished the scanty supplies of rice and sweet potatoes

HOPE

for the little ones from the proceeds of any jobs of washing or of sewing which they could find, even before the old home was given up, and they had come to live in the squalid quarter where Amada found them. That Herculano was "happy in the Campo Santo", the Señora did not doubt, after a sorrowful glance at the withered limbs and listless eyes of the two little sisters. How could it be otherwise, with food at starvation prices, and no work for even the honest and industrious?

"I would gladly have taken Amada away with us," the Señora said to Violeta, as, after awhile, they watched the big sister leading away the little ghosts of children down the avenue.

"To Spain?" Violeta asked, with a more sober look on her face than it had worn since the day when the first certain news of her brother's death had come. "She will never leave Cuba, mamá."

"When will this weary war end?" sighed the lady, whose heart lay buried under the *guásima* tree at La Florida.

"Surely the United States will fight now, mamá, interfering with what is none of their concern," Violeta cried, with scornful lip. "Of course, we would never have stooped so

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

low as to blow up their battleship, but they will always believe that Spain destroyed the *Maine*. Perhaps they will bombard Havana and kill us all, and then I shall never see Spain, our beautiful Spain !”

The Señora only shook her head mournfully, as she still gazed after the three figures which were no more than specks now, as they reached the gates.

“Poor starving little ones,” she sighed again. “We will help them all we can, Violeta, now that Amada has found them. At least they have carried off food for a day or two in good Doña Isabel’s bag. Yes, with you, daughter, I think the American States will interfere, at last. Surely our poor country will not attempt to hold out against them, and the war will end, and Plácido will come to find Amada, and again the family will make a little home, in the country, all together, perhaps. He shall have for his own the rented acres at La Reseda, poor, faithful fellow !”

“And we will go to Spain, mother, and forget all about this dreadful island, with its fevers and its rebels, and its burned-out homes.”

Violeta, in the lightness of her shallow heart,

HOPE

waltzed gaily across the verandah, whirling out of her way Cristóbal Colon, whose great eyes rolled in amazement from the Señora's mournful face to the mirthful one of the dancing girl.

"I am glad she thanked you, Cristóbal Colon," the lady said, recovering her usual serenity, and smiling upon the boy. "Yes, I saw your delight when she patted your shoulder, and showed you the poor little sisters. Good Cristóbal! some day, perhaps, we shall all be happy again!"

But the days grew into weeks, and the weeks had become months before intervention and war were declared by the United States.

Proud, foolish Spain yielded not one iota of her demands; long-enduring Cuba yielded not one iota of hers. Skirmishes and ambuscades still picked off men here and there on both sides, while want and disease slew their thousands in seaport and swamp.

In April came from the United States the long-dreaded, long-desired declaration of war with Spain, and the hope which died in the Spanish breast reanimated the Cuban patriot. Half-way around the world from the Carib-

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

bean Sea, Manilla had fallen under Admiral Dewey's guns.

Yet again the days and weeks lengthened into months. Great battleships and transports ploughed the West Indian waters, and blockaded Cuban ports. American veterans vied with boy heroes in endurance beneath the waving Stars and Stripes, by sea and land, and while Havana in the northwest, blockaded but unattacked, crouched behind her fortifications on the verge of the grave of the *Maine* and her two hundred and sixty men, Santiago in the southeast trembled to the core and trained her guns on "Old Glory."

The end came at last when General Toral surrendered his sword to General Shafter under the *ceiba* tree at Santiago, on that July day of 1898, and Cuba was free from Spanish rule.

But the horrors of war were not yet over. No name of freedom can return the dead to sorrowing homes, nor in a moment, nor in years, cause a wasted land to blossom as the rose. And "Cuba Libre" had not dried her last tear, nor heaved her last sigh, even with the fall of the red and yellow banner of Spain. Yet Amada, in Havana, awaited the

HOPE

coming of Plácido with courage, when at last, with the beginning of 1899, the "Stars and Stripes" floated from the palace flagstaff, and patriots were no longer called rebels. She heard ere-long that her cousin was alive and well, and with Gómez in the east, and she was content.

A little more patience, and Pablo would again find a garden to bloom somewhere, under his matchless care; Helena would again sit and gossip in the doorway of a cleaner home than the overcrowded room of the hovel in which Amada had found them; Micaela and the little sisters would have enough to eat; and Amada — well, Amada's hair would grow long and lovely after awhile, and the gentle cousin Plácido — a brave soldier now — would come to find them all again. Perhaps a happy day might arrive when they would all go to the country, that Helena, the mother, might find what comfort was left in the neighborhood of her youth, and that Pablo might heal his griefs among Plácido's own fruits and blossoms. Then, Consuelo and the little Ana might have pets to their dear hearts' content, while she, Amada, — for all this was the planning of her own happy thoughts, —

LITTLE CUBA LIBRE

being almost a woman now, would help Micaela take care of the family.

And the legend written amid the purple and gold of the pansies : "Love ye your enemies" ? With other treasures the pictured card had forever vanished. But upon those who have long followed the only road to true freedom is devolved the duty of helping to fill Free Cuba with that spirit of Love which alone can make her free indeed.

